

MEDIEVAL
MOsaIC I



LEA TASSIE
LEANNE TAYLOR

MEDIEVAL MOSAIC I

BOOKS BY LEA TASSIE

Tour Into Danger

Cats in Clover
Siamese Summers
Cat Under Cover
Cats & Crayons
Calico Cat Caper

The Case of the Copycat Killer

Deception Bay
Deep Water
Dire Straits

Green Blood Rising
Red Blood Falling
Shockwave

A Clear Eye
Double Image
Eyes Like a Hawk

Harvest
Walking the Windsong
Connections

Two Shakes of a Lamb's Tail
Baa Baa Black Sheep, Have You Any Words?
The Wordy Ram

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Books Edited by Lea Tassie  
Charger the Soldier  
Charger the Weapon  
Charger the God  
The Missing Year

# MEDIEVAL MOSAIC I

BY

LEA TASSIE

&

LEANNE TAYLOR



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Victoria British Columbia

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**Writing is easy. All you have to do is cross out the wrong words. (Mark Twain)**

**For: Mateo, Mom Ellen, and Sneaky Pete**

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# Introduction

Most people regard the medieval era as a dark, dead, dreadful time. But many things we take for granted today trace their origins to that period. The banking system. Universities. Cities. The printing press. The emergence of Europe as a power in the world. Far from being completely Dark, the medieval period was a tumultuous stretch of a thousand years during which the reality we know today in the West emerged.

The Middle Ages lasted approximately from 500 to 1500 CE, following the collapse of the Roman Empire. The period was one of human expansion, centralization, and great political upheaval, giving rise to the founding of several modern European countries. It was also dominated by a surge in Christianity, which led to the Crusades.

Language also changed, though most of the population was illiterate. The Norman Conquest of 1066 established French as the language of literature and transformed the English language from Old English (c. 500-1100) to Middle English (c. 1100-1500). English emerged as the standard literary medium, but it was not until the 1700s that Latin disappeared from legal documents.

Now, we can read the written word as ink on paper or pixels on the screen. As a means of communicating ideas and storing information, written language, from early etchings in clay to the world of digital access, is the single most important and far-reaching technology available to humans.



## Legacy: Arthurian Saga

Mary Stewart's popular books tell the tale of the legendary King Arthur and his Round Table. The four books titled *The Crystal Cave*, *The Hollow Hills*, *The Last Enchantment*, and *The Wicked Day* have now been bundled in an e-book called *Legacy: Arthurian Saga*.

The story takes place in fifth century Britain, a country of chaos and division after the Roman withdrawal. Merlin, the illegitimate son of a princess, becomes a powerful magician and takes on the task of keeping watch over young Arthur Pendragon, son of Uther Pendragon, king of the Britons.

King Uther is killed in battle two years after Arthur's birth, throwing the country into civil war. Arthur is raised by Sir Ector and, when he is about 15, in the famous episode of the sword in the stone, he becomes the true High King of the Britons. In a long series of battles, Arthur ends the civil wars, then creates the Round Table, whose members are to embody the noblest ideals of chivalry.

But his plans go awry. The love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot splits the Round Table into factions. When war breaks out between Arthur and Lancelot, Arthur's bastard son, Mordred, seizes Guinevere and the throne. Most of the Round Table Knights set off in a quest for the Holy Grail.

Galahad, the son of Lancelot, finally achieves the Grail. But, in a last battle between Arthur and Mordred, both are killed. Just before he dies, Arthur boards a mysterious ship that carries him off to Avalon, from whence he will one day return in an hour of utmost need for his country.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Stewart (1916 - 2014) had a distinguished career as a novelist, beginning with the publication of *Madam, Will You Talk?* She went on to develop the romantic mystery genre, featuring smart, adventurous heroines who could hold their own in dangerous situations. She published more than twenty successful novels, including five about King Arthur and the Round Table, as well as children's stories, short stories, and poems. All her novels have been bestsellers on both sides of the Atlantic, not only because of her prose, but also because of excellent research and well-crafted settings, many in England but also in such locations as Damascus and the Greek islands, as well as Spain, France, Austria, and more.

Regarding the Arthurian saga, she noted that the novels are works of the imagination, but firmly based in both history and legend. She used fragments from two sources, the *History of the Kings of Britain*, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, written in the twelfth century, and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, written by Sir Thomas Malory, in the fifteenth.

She says there is no doubt Arthur existed. The first definite mention of him appears circa 828 in the *Historia Brittonum*, where he is presented as a military leader fighting against the invading Saxons in 5th- to 6th-century Sub-Roman Britain at the Battle of Badon.

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The Words

Two lists of weird and wonderful words follow. The first lists those words which don't have a story, merely the necessary definition. The second list contains words with interesting stories or details.

Words without Stories

adur — a dialectal substitute for “adit,” entrance to a mine
braud — brother, as in “How’re you doin’, bro?”

chaffering — haggling about the price of something; chattering
corwalch — the Welsh word for sparrow-hawk
disbreath — exhalation of breath or scent
dislimn — to obliterate or make dim
dorter — a dormitory, especially in a religious house
drag — as a noun, a net or seine for fishing
fair-maids — Cornish name for smoked pilchards (herring)
Fair Maids — in Cornwall, daffodils
felloe — the rim of a spoked wheel
firedrake — a fire-breathing dragon or a fiery meteor
forus — a stable foundation, a dwelling, the gangway of a ship
hand gallop — a pace between a canter and a gallop
hardihood — boldness, daring, courage, fortitude, hardiness
laverock — Scottish for lark, especially a skylark
levin — archaic; a bolt of lightning, a bright flame or light
metheglin — mead flavored with herbs or spices
mim-mouthed — prim, prudish, affectedly proper in speech
nid-nod — to nod repeatedly from drowsiness
ousel (or ouzel) — a species of thrush
shippon — a cow barn or cattle shed
skep — a straw or wicker beehive or basket
whin — gorse, a bush with sharp thorns and yellow flowers

Words with Stories

ACANTHUS

“Acanthus” is defined as follows:

—any of the acanthus family of prickly perennial herbs chiefly of the Mediterranean region. These deciduous plants have large leaves and purple and white flowers.

—an ornamentation (as in a Corinthian capital) representing the leaves of the acanthus.

Look at any classical building and you will probably find an acanthus leaf lurking somewhere, either on the capital of a Corinthian column, on friezes and borders of a Greek ruin, and in countless William Morris designs. It’s also a beautiful plant in many gardens.

The acanthus is a symbol of immortality and, as a decorative motif, was being used as early as 500 BCE in Grecian art. It has inspired countless artists, sculptors, architects and even poets. The Roman architectural historian Vitruvius, in his work, *De Architectura* (written c25 BCE), tells us that the sight of the elegant form of the plant inspired sculptor Callimachus to create the Corinthian capital.

ARTIFICER

An “artificer” may be any one of the following:

- a skilled craftsman or artistic worker
- a clever designer or inventor
- a serviceman trained in mechanics
- in *Dungeons & Dragons*, a character class

AUGURY

An “augury” is the interpretation of omens, based on the appearance and behavior of animals, to foretell what will happen in the future.

Augury was a Greco-Roman religious practice of observing the behavior of birds in order to receive omens. When the augur read these signs, it was referred to as “taking the auspices.” Depending upon the birds, the auspices from the gods could be favorable or unfavorable (auspicious or inauspicious). Sometimes politically motivated augurs would fabricate unfavorable auspices in order to delay certain state functions, such as elections.

This type of omen reading was already a millennium old in the time of Classical Greece. In the fourteenth-century BCE, diplomatic correspondence preserved in Egypt shows that the king of Alasia in Cyprus needed an “eagle diviner” to be sent from Egypt. Divining by bird signs was largely replaced with sacrifice-divination by inspection of the sacrificial victim’s liver—*haruspices*. Plato notes that hepatoscopy held greater prestige than augury by means of birds.

BEATEN SILVER

“Beaten silver” is silver metal that has been subjected to pounding until smooth and thin. It was used in medieval times for jewelry and for coins, such as silver pennies. The name “silver” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *seolfor*.

Silver was in use as early as 4,000 BCE. Around 700 BCE it was used as an alloy with gold called electrum, and in making coins. The Greek and Roman civilizations employed silver as an antibiotic and disinfectant, which continues to this day.

Silver appears white with an attractive luster and is unique because it has the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any known element. It is a soft metal, just a little harder than gold, and can be bent or beaten into almost any shape.

The term “sterling silver” refers to an amalgam of 92.5% silver and 7.5% copper, which creates an alloy greater in strength than either metal. Sterling silver is used for silverware and high-end musical instruments. Sometimes silver is mixed with gold to form “white gold.” Silver was useful in the production of photographic film, but less so now that digital photography and printing are so common.

Silver is not a natural or needed mineral in the human body but it does have a toxic effect on some bacteria and viruses. This is why silver is used in silverware and other products as a disinfectant. In older days silver was used to store liquids such as milk and water. It is still applied as a disinfectant, integrated into clothing, kitchen utensils, etc.

In Asia, silver is beaten to less than one micrometer thick (or thin!) and called vark, which is used to decorate South Asian confectionery, food, and spices. Though edible, silver and gold are entirely flavorless and have no nutritional value. The tradition is popular and worldwide consumption of vark is around 275 tons annually. Considering how light and thin it is, that has to represent several million candies!

Anyone for a silver beefsteak?

BITTED

“Bitted” is an adjective, which means checked or controlled, as one might control a horse with a bit. The earliest known use of the word is in the Middle English period, 1150 to 1500. It can also apply to other situations, for example, “my own hysteria was bitted by upbringing and respect.”

A similar adjective is “hard-bitted,” which means hard to control by the bit, such as a horse which is hard-mouthed, obstinate, or unyielding.

Another version is “hard-bitten,” which means toughened by experience, or not given to sentimentality or gentleness.

BONNY

“Bonny” is a Scottish dialect word and means beautiful and nice to look at or to be with, as in, “She’s a bonny lass.” It can also mean merry or lively or to be reckoned with, as in “It cost a bonny penny!” Then there are all those bonny (plump) babies to admire.

Wiktionary says that in mining, “bonny” means a round and compact bed of ore, or a distinct bed, not communicating with a vein.

Would a miner regard a bonny as bonny?

BUR

“Bur” (also spelled burr) means any of the following:

- the prickly seed vessel of such plants as the burdock
- a persistently clinging or nettlesome person or thing
- a rough protuberance, especially a burl on a tree
- any of various rotary cutting tools attached to a drill

The idiom “burr under one’s saddle” is a common expression used to describe an annoyance or irritation that someone cannot seem to shake off. It is often used metaphorically, comparing the feeling of discomfort caused to the horse by a

burr stuck under its saddle to the feeling of being bothered by something that just won't go away.

While its origins are not entirely clear, the phrase is believed to have originated from the American West during the 1800s when cowboys would use actual burrs to irritate their horses as a form of punishment.

Or, as one of us heard when young and living in horse country, the burr was placed under the saddle, so that when a novice rider climbed aboard, the horse would get annoyed about the irritation and buck off the rider.

CALIBURN

According to Mary Stewart's notes, "Caliburn" is the most pronounceable of the names for Arthur's sword, which was later romanticized as Excalibur.

CALUMNY

"Calumny" is the act of uttering misrepresentations or false charges, maliciously calculated to harm another's reputation. Synonyms are "slander" and "libel."

Calumny made an appearance in these famous words from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go." The word derives originally from the Latin word *calumnia* (meaning "false accusation," "false claim," or "trickery"), which itself traces to the Latin verb *calvi*, meaning "to deceive."

CAPARISONED

A "caparison" is an ornamental or protective covering for a horse or other animal and may also mean rich clothing for a person. We can apply it to nature, too, as in "The trees stood majestically caparisoned with innumerable leaves."

In the Middle Ages, caparisons were part of the horse armor known as barding, worn during battles and tournaments. They were adopted in the twelfth century in response to conditions of campaigning in the Crusades, where local armies employed many archers, both on foot and horse. Modern reenactment tests have shown that a loose caparison protects the horse reasonably well against arrows, especially if worn over an undercloth. Medieval caparisons were frequently embroidered with the coat of arms of the horse's rider.

In 1507, a horse disguised as a unicorn at the tournament of the Wild Knight and the Black Lady in Edinburgh had a caparison of black and white damask lined with canvas. Velvet caparisons, lined with buckram, were made for Henrietta Maria and her gentlewomen in the 1630s.

In modern times, they are used mainly in parades and for historical reenactments. The word is derived from the Latin *caparo*, meaning a cape.

CARACOLE

A "caracole" is a half turn to right or left executed by a horse and rider, representative of the massed cavalry tactic once used in the military.

The military caracole has a long history of use by various cavalry forces that used missile weapons. The Scythians and Parthians were thought to use it, while ancient Iberian cavalry famously developed their own variation known as the "Cantabrian circle." It was used by the Mongols of Genghis Khan and also by the Han Chinese military much earlier. It was later revived by European militaries in the mid-16th century in an attempt to integrate gunpowder weapons into cavalry tactics.

The word was originally borrowed from Spanish *caracol* meaning snail or a spiral staircase (*escalera de caracole*).

CATAMITE

A “catamite” is a boy or youth who is used for sexual purposes by a man.

In ancient Greece and Rome, a catamite was a pubescent boy who was the intimate companion of an older male, usually in a pederastic relationship. It was generally a term of affection and literally means “Ganymede” in Latin, but it was also used as a term of insult when directed toward a grown man. According to Greek mythology, Ganymede was the name of the beautiful Trojan youth abducted by Zeus to act as his companion and cupbearer.

CAT’S PAW

“Cat’s paw” has several meanings:

- a person used by others: a puppet, pawn, dupe, or tool
- a light ripple on a calm sea
- a hitch knot with two eyes for attaching a line to a hook
- one of a few species of mussel
- informal name for some species of the plant *Anigozanthus*

A cat’s claw, appropriately, is a metal hand tool use to extract nails from wood.

CAT ICE

“Cat ice” is the thin layer of brittle ice formed over puddles, from which the water has afterward receded. It is also called shell ice.

Cat ice forms in depressions in fields, edges of pools, and on tiny ponds, just like thin glass. It is so called because the bubbles in the ice look like cat eyes, or perhaps because a cat could break it by merely stepping on it.

Kids love stepping on and crackling the first “cat-ice” on a late autumn morning. Many adults do, too, and that includes us.

CELANDINE

The “celandine” is a low-growing, perennial flowering plant in the buttercup family *Ranunculaceae*. It has fleshy dark green, heart-shaped leaves and distinctive flowers with bright yellow, glossy petals, a cheerful sight in spring. Although mostly a welcome, fleeting wildflower in gardens, it spreads easily and can be seen as a nuisance.

The plant was introduced to North America in the late 1600s as an herbal remedy for skin problems and many other ailments. But the plant is poisonous if ingested raw and potentially fatal to grazing animals. For these reasons, several US states have banned the plant or listed it as a noxious weed.

CHARY

“Chary” means discreetly cautious, hesitant and vigilant about dangers and risks, slow to accept, wary, choosy, finicky, or mean. The meaning of the word evolved in the sixteenth century from “full of care” to “careful.”

CHOUGH

A “chough” is a bird of the genus *Corvus*, which includes jays, crows, and jackdaws. Choughs have black plumage and brightly colored legs, feet, and bills, and are resident in Europe, Eurasia and also North Africa. They perform spectacular aerobatics, pair for life, and display fidelity to their breeding sites, which are usually caves or crevices in a cliff face. They feed, often in flocks, on insects found in short grazed grassland, but also on food from human habitation, especially in winter.

According to legend, King Arthur, on his death in battle, was transformed into a chough, “talons and beaks all red with blood.” Lines in the Cornish Gorseth ceremony insist that:

“Still Arthur watches our shore
In guise of a chough there flown.”

CLARY

“Clary” (or clary sage) is an aromatic herbaceous plant of the mint family, some kinds of which are used as culinary and medicinal herbs. The plants have showy violet, pink, or white flower clusters and yield an essential oil used as a flavoring and in perfumery.

CORACLE

A “coracle” (also “curragh”) is a small round, flat-bottomed boat made of wickerwork covered with a watertight material, and propelled with a paddle. In the 1500s, the watertight material was animal hide. Today, it’s tarred calico, canvas or fiberglass.

Designed for maneuvering in swiftly flowing streams, the coracle has been in use in the British Isles for millennia, having been noted by Julius Caesar in his invasion of Britain in the first century BCE, and used in his military campaigns in Spain.

CORNELIAN

A “cornelian” (also spelled “carnelian”) is a semi-precious stone of an orange or orange-red variety of chalcedony and used for jewelry.

Carnelian was recovered from Bronze Age Minoan layers at Knossos on Crete in a form that demonstrated its use in decorative arts; this use dates to approximately 1800 BCE. During Roman times, carnelian was used to make engraved gems for signet or seal rings for imprinting a seal with wax on documents, because hot wax does not stick to carnelian.

CORRIE

A “corrie” is a steep-walled semicircular basin in a mountain and may contain a lake. Also known as a cirque, a corrie is created by glaciation.

CRESSET

A “cresset” is a metal cup or basket, often mounted on or suspended from a pole, containing oil, pitch, a rope steeped in rosin or something else flammable. The contents are lit and burned as a light or beacon. Cressets mounted on the walls of Renaissance palaces in Italy were the first form of street lighting.

The term can also refer to a lamp where the wick burns in a cup or cavity, which can be of ceramic or stone. An account of the monastical church of Durham, written in 1593, says “Also there is standinge in the south pillar of the Quire doore of the Lanthorne, in a corner of the said pillar, a four-squared STONN, which hath been finely wrought, in every square a large fine Image, whereon did stand a four- square stone above that, which had twelve cressetts wrought in that stone, which was filled with tallow, and everye night one of them was lighted, when the day was gone, and did burn to give light to the monks at midnight, when they came to mattens.”

CROMLECH

In 3500 BCE, the settlers in Wales began to construct dwelling places from large, interlocking stones which were made in such a way as to remain stable without the use of mortar or cement. Today, these types of structure are more commonly known as megalithic, from the Ancient Greek words *megas* meaning ‘great’ and *lithos* meaning ‘stone.’ However, in the Brythonic language—the shared Celtic language which was the forefather to the Welsh, Cornish, Breton, Cumbric and continental Celtic languages of Europe—the dwellings were known as “cromlech” or “cromlechi” which originated from the words *crom* meaning “bent” and *llech* meaning flagstone.” Around 150 cromlechi can still be seen in Wales today.

Another definition says the cromlech is a “structure consisting of a large, flat, unhewn stone resting horizontally atop three or more upright ones.”

Although it was originally assumed that these structures were

inspired by buildings in the Near East, advancements in carbon dating in the twentieth century have shown us that these structures were, in fact, the first solid man-made constructions, pre-dating the Egyptian pyramids by almost 1500 years.

As community numbers swelled, the use of the cromlech as a meeting place was superseded by the development of the henge, a large circular area bordered by a ditch. This area was used for both trade and for local rituals. The most famous relic of this type of early settlement is Stonehenge in Wiltshire, which dates back to approximately 2500 BCE.

DEMESNE

Definitions of “demesne” (a variant of domain) are as follows:

- possession of real property in one’s own right
- manorial land retained for the private use of a feudal lord
- grounds belonging to a mansion or country house
- an extensive piece of landed property; an estate
- a district; a territory
- a realm; a domain

The old system of manorial land tenure, broadly termed feudalism, was conceived in France, but exported to areas impacted by the French expansion during the Middle Ages, including the British Isles after the Norman Conquest.

In this feudal system, the demesne was all the land retained and managed by a lord of the manor for his own use and support. It was not necessarily all contiguous to the manor house. A portion of the demesne lands, called the lord’s waste, served as public roads and common pasture land for the lord and his tenants. Most of the remainder of the land in the manor was sub-enfeoffed by the lord to others as sub-tenants.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, royal demesne is the land held by the Crown, and ancient demesne is the legal term for the land held by the king at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086.

The word “barton,” which is historically synonymous to demesne and is an element found in many place-names, can refer to a demesne farm: it derives from Old English *bere* (barley) and *ton* (enclosure).

The word arose originally from Latin *dominicus* “belonging to a master,” from *dominus* “lord, master,” from *domus* “house.”

DISTIL

“Distil” (usually spelled “distill” in the US) is a verb meaning: —to make a liquid stronger or purer by heating it until it changes to a gas and then cooling it so that it changes back into a liquid: Some strong alcoholic drinks such as whisky are made by distilling.

—to extract from something the essential meaning or most important aspects. For example, “My travel notes were distilled into a book.”

ERGOT

“Ergot” is a fungus that grows on rye and less commonly on other grasses such as wheat.

During the Middle Ages, ergotism, a severe reaction to ergot-contaminated food (such as rye bread), was common and known as St. Anthony’s fire. Some historians believe that ergot played a role in the Salem witch hunt of 1692. They think that some women in Salem developed peculiar behaviors and accused other women of being witches as a result of eating ergot-contaminated food.

In spite of serious safety concerns, ergot has been used as medicine for excessive bleeding during menstrual periods, to expel placenta after childbirth, and many other conditions. But there is no good scientific evidence to support these uses. However, ergot does contain chemicals that can help reduce bleeding by causing a narrowing of the blood vessels.

Convulsions, muscle spasms, vomiting, hallucinations, and a gangrenous pain where the victim's limbs, fingers, toes, and nose were "eaten up by the holy fire that blackened like charcoal" characterize ergot poisoning. Victims often lost parts of their extremities or entire limbs due to blood vessel constriction associated with gangrenous ergotism.

Julius Caesar lost legions of soldiers to ergot poisoning during his campaigns in Gaul. Severe ergot epidemics in France between 900 CE and 1300 CE killed from 20,000 to 50,000 people, leaving the nation open to invasions that eventually resulted in this Holy Roman kingdom becoming two nations, France and Germany.

The ergot fungus contains a number of highly poisonous and psychoactive alkaloids, including lysergic acid (LSD), which was synthesized from the ergot fungus in 1938 by chemist, Albert Hoffmann.

Ergotism is rare now due to careful screening of cereal grains.

FALDSTOOL

A "faldstool" can mean any of the following:

- a folding chair or stool, especially one used by a bishop when not occupying the throne or when presiding away from the cathedral
- a desk at which the litany is recited
- a small desk at which worshipers kneel to pray, especially one at which the British sovereign kneels at the time of coronation.

FLEDGING

"Fledging" can mean any of the following:

- a young bird developing the feathers necessary for flying
- rearing until ready for flight or independent activity
- covering with feathers or down
- furnishing (something) with feathers
- feathering an arrow

FORA

“Fora” is the plural of forum, a place or a meeting where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged. In North America, it means a court or tribunal. In ancient Roman cities, a forum was a public square or marketplace used for judicial and other business.

FRITILLARY

A “fritillary” may be either:

—a Eurasian plant of the lily family, with bell-like flowers

—a butterfly with orange-brown wings that are checkered with black

GARTH

A “garth” is a courtyard surrounded by a cloister or, in the Middle Ages, a yard or garden. This led to the word being given as a last name to people who worked in or near a garden.

GUERDON

As a noun, “guerdon” is a reward or recompense. As a verb, it means to give a reward to someone. Guerdon dates back to the 14th century, when Geoffrey Chaucer used it in *The Romaunt of the Rose* (ca. 1366). Shakespeare used guerdon a couple of times in his plays. It’s a rare word today, but contemporary writers do use it on occasion for poetic effect.

HECATE

“Hecate” is a Greek goddess associated mainly with night, the underworld, and witchcraft. She is also connected to magic, crossroads, drugs, the Moon, graves, and ghosts. Her earliest appearance in literature was in Hesiod’s *Theogony* in the 8th century BCE as a goddess of great honor with domains in sky, earth, and sea. She was one of several deities worshipped in ancient Athens as a protector of the household, alongside Zeus, Hestia, Hermes, and Apollo.

The Romans often knew her by the epithet of Trivia, one she shares with Diana, each in their roles as protector of travel and of the crossroads (trivia means “three ways”). Hecate was closely identified with Diana and Artemis in the Roman era.

HORNBEAM

A “hornbeam” is any of a genus of trees related to the birches and having smooth gray bark and hard white wood. The name derives from the hardness of the woods (likened to horn) and the Old English beam, meaning tree.

The American hornbeam is also occasionally known as blue-beech, ironwood, or musclewood. The latter two names come from the hardness of the wood and the muscled appearance of the trunk and limbs.

In folklore, the hornbeam is a symbol of strength due to its hard, sturdy wood. It was once believed that tonics made from hornbeam leaves could cure fatigue and exhaustion.

HYPOCAUST

A “hypocaust” is a hollow space under the floor of an ancient building, into which hot air was sent for heating rooms or bath water, the first system of central heating.

The word derives from Ancient Greek *hypo* meaning “under” and *caust-*, meaning “burnt” (as in caustic). The earliest reference to such a system suggests that the Temple of Ephesus in 350 BCE was heated in this manner.

Hypocausts were used for heating hot baths and other public buildings in ancient Rome. They were also used in private homes. It was considered proper and necessary by the wealthier merchant class for their villas. The ruins of Roman hypocausts have been found throughout Europe.

Hot air and smoke from the furnace would circulate through the enclosed area of the hypocaust and then up through clay

or tile flues in the walls of the rooms above to outlets in the roof, thereby heating the floors and walls of the rooms above. These tile flues were referred to as caliducts.

The heat output was regulated by adjusting the amount of wood fed to the fire. It was expensive and labor-intensive to run a hypocaust, as it required constant attention to the fire and a lot of fuel, so the feature was usually found only in large villas and public baths.

In colonial British North America, the house of Maryland governor Charles Calvert (now part of the Historic Inns of Annapolis) was constructed in the 1720s with a hypocaust to heat a greenhouse for growing tropical plants.

KINGCUP

“Kingcup” is another term for marsh marigold and is part of the buttercup family. It is a familiar sight in wetlands and damp grassy areas, the brilliant yellow flowers braving the cold winds of early spring. It was known in Gaelic as *Lus bhuidhe bealtuinn*, ‘the yellow plant of Beltane.’

There is the proliferation of folk names for marsh marigold, some of them delightfully weird: May blob, horse blob, crazy Beth, publican’s cloak, water gowan, cow lily, soldier’s buttons and publicans-and-sinners are just a few.

In traditional May Day celebrations, marsh marigold was one of the flowers collected and placed in windows and over doorways, along with sprigs of rowan, gorse, hazel and, of course, hawthorn, the May tree itself. On the Isle of Man it was believed to be a powerful protection against witches. In County Antrim, children used to push a kingcup blossom through the letterbox of every house in the village, as a token to ward off evil.

We don’t know when the name ‘kingcup’ first arose but it’s easy to see how the rich gold color and cup-like buds suggest the wealth and power of kings.

LADY'S SLIPPER

"Lady's slipper" is a subfamily of orchids. The flowers are shaped like slippers, pouches which trap insects so they are forced to climb up past the staminode, behind which they collect or deposit pollinia, thus fertilizing the flower. There are approximately 165 species in the subfamily.

Lady's slippers are among the most beloved orchids in North America. They're found in every U.S. state and Canadian province except three (Nevada, Hawaii, and Florida). The continent's 12 species display exquisite colors and patterns, from green-speckled palominos and cream-colored kentuckys to rose-colored queens.

Native Americans relied on lady's slippers to reduce fevers, cure headaches, and ease menstrual cramps and labor pains. But the orchid's crowning quality was the power to soothe.

Drinking tinctures of lady's slipper roots was a popular remedy for insomnia, anxiety, or general emotional tension. Native Americans generally collected the roots in the fall or early spring, dried them out and ground them into a powder. Since many of the active ingredients didn't dissolve in water, they often used some form of alcohol instead. The tribes that used them called them "moccasin flowers."

The medicine itself could border on revolting. The orchid's calming powers come from the chemical cypripedin, a bitter, cinnamon-colored powder in its underground stems. One nineteenth-century writer called it "rather unpleasant" with an odor "not unlike that noticed when near a herd of swine."

LIMED

"Limed" means:

- treated with lime (of wood, to bleach it)
- smeared with birdlime
- whitewashed (a wall, ceiling, etc.) with a mixture of lime and water

Birdlime (or bird lime) is an adhesive substance used in trapping birds. It is spread on a branch or twig, upon which a bird may land and thus be caught. Its use is illegal in many jurisdictions. Historically, the substance has been prepared in various ways, and from various materials.

A popular form in Europe was made from holly bark, boiled for 10 to 12 hours. After the green coating is separated from the other, it is stored in a moist place for two weeks. It is then pounded into a thick paste, until no wood fibers remain, and washed in running water until no small specks appear. After fermenting for four or five days, during which time it is frequently skimmed, the substance is mixed over a fire with a third part of nut oil. It is then ready for use.

Nathaniel Atcheson, secretary to the Society of Ship-Owners of Great Britain, in his 1811 work *On the Origin and Progress of the North-West Company of Canada* with a history of the fur trade, mentions birdlime as an important import commodity for use in the Canadian west in the late 18th century.

MIDDEN

A “midden” is a refuse heap, a dump for domestic waste of all kinds. Old middens provide a useful, informative resource for archaeologists who wish to study the diets and habits of past societies of humans and animals. Different mechanisms, such as wind and water, create a matrix which can be analyzed to provide seasonal and climatic information.

Some animals establish ground burrows, also known as middens, that are used mostly for food storage. For example, the North American red squirrel usually has one large active midden in each territory. A midden may be a regularly used animal toilet area or dunghill, created by many mammals, such as the hyrax, and also serving as a territorial marker.

Octopus middens are piles of debris that the octopus piles up to conceal the entrance of its den. These are commonly made of rocks, shells, and the bones of prey.

The word “midden” is still in everyday use in Scotland and has come by extension to refer to anything that is a muddle, a mess, or chaos.

MURREY

“Murrey” is a dark purplish-red color, similar to mulberry.

The livery colors of the House of York in England in the fifteenth century were azure and murrey, as depicted on the shields of the Falcon of the Plantagenets and the White Lion of Mortimer, which are two of the Queen’s Beasts.

NEPENTHE

“Nepenthe” is defined as:

- an ancient potion to induce forgetfulness of pain or sorrow
- anything that produces sleep, forgetfulness, or pleasurable dreaminess
- in medical use, “a drug having sedative properties” (1680s)

Nepenthe and its ancestors have long been popular with poets. Homer used the Greek grandparent of “nepenthe” in a way many believe is a reference to opium. Edgar Allan Poe sought to “Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore.” The term is an alteration of the Latin *nepenthes*.

ORCHIS

“Orchis” means orchid, especially any of a genus with fleshy roots and a spurred lip. The name is from the Ancient Greek *orchis*, meaning “testicle,” from the appearance of the paired subterranean tuberoids.

Greek mythology includes a character called Orchis whose transformation is said to be the origin of the orchid flower.

The story goes this way: Orchis was the son of a nymph and a satyr. One day, during a festival in honor of Dionysus, the god of wine, Orchis raped one of Dionysus’s priestesses, so the

god killed him. His father mourned his death and asked the gods to bring him back, but they refused, and instead settled on creating the orchid flower out of him. Another version of his death has him being torn apart by wild animals or the priestesses themselves, and, through the intervention of the gods, the orchid grows from his testicles.

But, the story is not included in modern works noted for their completeness regarding ancient Greek mythology. “Orchis” as a proper name, and the names sometimes given to his parents, Patellanus and Acolasia, do not appear anywhere before 1704, the year when French writer Louis Liger published a gardening book called *Le Jardinier Fleuriste et Historiographe*. Liger’s book is the oldest known work where Orchis’s tale appears, and it is considered likely that it was his own invention, although it does borrow elements from genuine myths, such as those of Pentheus (who is torn apart) and Hyacinthus (who dies and is transformed into a flower).

PHALERA

A phalera was a sculpted disk, usually made of gold, silver, bronze or glass, and worn on the breastplate during parades by Roman soldiers who had been awarded it as a kind of medal. Roman military units could also be awarded phalerae for distinguished conduct in action. These awards were often mounted on the staffs of the unit’s standards. Phalerae might depict either a Roman god, an image from Greco-Roman mythology, or images of popular significance.

The term can refer to disks crafted by continental Celts for religious and ornamental purposes, especially those used on equestrian gear. It may refer to a cameo worn as an ornament.

QUERN

A “quern” is a primitive handmill comprised of two heavy stones used for grinding grain. Neolithic peoples used stone querns to grind hulled grains, which were then boiled to make a kind of porridge.

SALLOW

“Sallow,” as an adjective, means unhealthy in appearance — often yellow in color — and is almost always used to describe someone’s complexion. Literature of the 1800s abounds with sallow people—Charles Dickens applied the word to characters in no fewer than 12 novels—but the word had been in use with the same meaning for centuries before then.

“Sallow,” as a noun, means any of several Old World broad-leaved willows which were important sources of charcoal and tanbark. In England, it was used in Palm Sunday processions and decorations before real palm leaves were imported.

There are over 400 species in the genus *Salix* growing around the world and the impact that they have had on gardens, mythology, and medicine is massive. Since this tree survives tough conditions, they are everywhere.

The willow was one of the most useful plants for early peoples. Ancient Europeans and the Inuit of the Alaskan peninsula even made a type of food porridge from the catkins. The catkins produce a reddish dye.

The iconic weeping willow is native to Asia and features prominently in their folktales and art. The ancient Chinese believed that willow branches would ward off evil spirits and they were often carried or placed over doorways to keep those spirits away.

It is said that the first weeping willow grew in Babylon where the Children of Israel were taken into slavery. When they hung their harps on the willow tree, the branches were forever destined to ‘weep’ and grow downward. Its actual origin was further east in China, but the legend is popular.

Willows are popular in Native American and Celtic legends. An old Celtic custom says that if you knock on a willow tree, it will send away bad luck. That is where the saying ‘knock on wood’ originated. People do plant willows near their homes to ward off bad luck. European peoples also believed the wind in

the willow leaves were really elves who whispered among themselves as people passed underneath. It is said, too, that if you confess your secrets to a willow tree, the secret will be forever trapped inside the wood. Native Americans tied willow branches to their boats to protect them from storms and to their lodges for the protection of the Great Spirit.

Willow wood is supposed to be the best choice for divining water, and making magic harps. Some wizards use it for spell casting wands.

Whether you believe in magic or not, willows do have powerful characteristics. Willow bark contains salicin, a natural form of aspirin and has been used for thousands of years to relieve pain and to reduce inflammation. Willow wood is also able to absorb trauma or shock without splitting and some of the best cricket bats and Dutch wooden shoes are made from willow. Since the wood is pliable, it is used by basket-makers as well.

North American willows are a host plant for the Mourning Cloak butterfly and the catkins that bloom very early in the spring are one of the first pollen sources for honeybees.

SCRITCH

“Scritch” is another of those words with a flexible nature, but the prime definition seems to be “screech,” a high shrill piercing cry usually expressing pain or terror.

In the 1520s, a barn owl was called a “scritch-owl.” In 1590, it was called a “screech-owl.” Now, in the US, small horned owls are called screech-owls. In the 1560s, concerning wagon-wheels, door-hinges, etc., scritch meant “make a shrill, grating sound.”

The word can also mean a light scratching sound, like a small animal burrowing or the act of scratching an itch.

And you can scritch a cat behind the ears.

SEA WRACK

“Sea wrack” is seaweed cast up on the shore by wind and wave. “Wrack” is part of the common names of several species of seaweed.

SETT

“Sett” has several meanings:

- the system of tunnels that is the home of a badger
- the pattern of threads in the plaid of a Scottish tartan
- the number of warp ends per inch in cloth (synonym: sley)
- a small, square piece of quarried stone used for paving

The most familiar use of “sett” is a badger’s den. It usually consists of a network of tunnels and numerous entrances. The largest setts are spacious enough to accommodate 15 or more animals with up to 1,000 feet of tunnels and as many as 40 openings. Such elaborate setts take many years to complete. One sett in north-eastern Germany has been shown to have been in use for over ten thousand years. Setts are typically excavated in soil that is well drained, easy to dig, and situated on sloping ground where there is some cover.

SHAW

“Shaw” means a small copse, thicket, or grove. In the 1570s, it meant a strip of wood forming the border of a field.

The Scots have their own take on it. There, it means the stalks and leaves of potatoes, turnips, and other cultivated root plants that appear above the ground.

SLOE-PLUM

The “sloe-plum” is the small, sour, blackish fruit of the blackthorn, *Prunus spinosa*, of the rose family.

The fruits are used to make sloe gin in Britain and patxaran in Basque Country. The wood is used to make walking sticks, including the Irish shillelagh.

TESSERA

A “tessera” (plural: tesserae) is:

—a small square tile of stone, glass, etc., used in mosaics

—a die or tally used in classical times, made of bone or wood

In early antiquity, mosaics were made from variously formed natural colored pebbles. By roughly 200 BCE, cut stone tesserae were being used in Greek mosaics. Ancient Roman decorative mosaic panels and floors were also produced during the 2nd century BCE, particularly at sites such as Pompeii. Marble and limestone were cut into small cubes and arranged into representational designs and geometric patterns.

Later, tesserae were made from colored glass, or clear glass backed with metal foils. The Byzantines used tesserae with gold leaf, in which case the glass pieces were thinner, with two glass pieces sandwiching the gold. This produced a golden reflection emanating from between the tesserae as well as the front, causing a far richer and more luminous effect than even plain gold leaf would create.

THEGN

In Anglo-Saxon England, a “thegn” (also spelled “thane”) was a person ranking between an earl and an ordinary freeman, holding land from the king or a lord in return for services rendered, often in the military. Thegns could earn their titles and lands or inherit them. Initially, the thegn ranked below all other Anglo-Saxon nobility; however, with the proliferation of thegns came a subdivision of the class. There were “king’s thegns,” who held certain privileges and answered only to the king, and inferior thegns that served other thegns or bishops.

The term thane was also used in early medieval Scandinavia for a class of retainers, and a title given to royal officials in medieval eastern Scotland, equivalent in rank to the child of an earl.

By a law of Ethelred II, the 12 senior thegns of any given hundred acted as a judicial committee that decided whether or

not a suspect should be officially accused of a crime. This was a very early precursor to the modern grand jury.

The power of thegns declined after the Norman Conquest when lords of the new regime took control of most lands in England. The term thane persisted in Scotland until the 1400s in reference to a hereditary tenant of the crown who did not serve in the military.

TRILITHON

A “trilithon” (or trilith) is a structure consisting of two large vertical stones (posts) supporting a third stone set horizontally across the top (lintel). It is commonly used in the context of megalithic monuments.

The word trilithon is derived from Greek, and means three stones. Famous trilithons are found in the Megalithic temples of Malta and the Osireion in Egypt. The term is also used to describe the groups of three stones in the Hunebed tombs of the Netherlands.

TUFA

“Tufa” is a soft, friable, and porous limestone, a sedimentary rock consisting of calcium carbonate and formed by the evaporation of water, especially at the mouth of a hot spring or on a drying lakebed.

VICUS

“Vicus” (plural *vici*) is a Latin term that refers to a variety of small settlements, whether in town, or in the countryside, in Roman territory, or elsewhere.

In Ancient Rome, *vicus* designated a village within a rural area or the neighborhood of a larger settlement. In the 1st century BCE, for administrative purposes, emperor Augustus reorganized the city into 14 regions, comprising 265 *vici*. Each vicus had its own board of officials who oversaw local matters.

These administrative divisions remained still in effect at least until the mid-4th century CE.

“Vicus” was also applied to the smallest administrative unit of a provincial town within the Roman Empire, referring to an ad hoc civilian settlement that sprang up close to and because of a nearby military fort or state-owned mining operation.

Unplanned, and originally lacking any public administrative buildings, the *vici* had no specific legal status (unlike other settlements) and often developed in order to profit from the presence of Roman troops. As with most garrison towns, they provided entertainment and supplies for the troops, but many also developed significant industries, especially metal and glass working.

Initially, many *vici* were transitory sites that followed a mobile unit; once a permanent garrison was established, they grew into larger townships, with some becoming chartered towns where no other existed nearby. Some outgrew their forts altogether, especially in the 3rd century once soldiers were permitted to marry.

Early *vici* had no civilian administration and were under the direct control of the Roman military commander. Those that attracted significant numbers of Roman citizens were later permitted to form local councils and some, such as the vicus at Eboracum (York), grew into regional centers and even provincial capitals.

WHINSTONE

“Whinstone” is used in the quarrying industry to describe any hard dark-colored rock. Examples include the igneous rocks, basalt and dolerite, as well as the sedimentary rock chert.

It may also mean a stone used to crush whin for use as winter feed for cattle.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* concludes that the etymology of

whin is obscure, though it has been claimed, fancifully, that the term derives from the sound the rock makes when struck with a hammer.

It is used for road chippings and dry stone walls, but its natural angular shapes do not fit together well and are not easy to build with. Its hardness makes it a difficult material to work. A common use is in the laying of patios and driveways.

WHITETHORN

“Whitethorn” can mean any of the following:

—a hawthorn (*Crataegus oxycantha*)

—any acacia that has peeling bark which gives the trunk a whitish appearance

—a whitish-barked shrub of the coastal mountains of the western US

Hawthorn shrubs and trees are widely distributed in northern temperate climates and especially in eastern North America. They usually have thorns, clusters of white flowers in the spring, and colorful orange, red, or yellow (rarely blue or black) fruits in the fall. The fruits, called haws, resemble tiny apples; some are used in jellies. Hawthorns are cultivated for ornament and, especially in England, for hedges (haw also means hedge). Hawthorn wood is very hard and is used for such small items such as tool handles.

In England, hawthorn flowers are associated with May Day, and the hawthorn (called also may, thorn, haw, whitethorn, and thorn apple) has long been used as a symbol of spring in English poetry. A hawthorn is the state flower of Missouri.

WINTERSTONE

A “winterstone” is a stone used like a hot water bottle, to keep things warm. For example, “There was kindling left by the hearth, and what looked like a winterstone ready among the ashes. I made fire and, when the stone was warm, drew it out, wrapped it in cloth, and put it to the old man’s feet.”

In northern Canada, people used to do exactly the same thing. For a trip into the village to buy groceries and pick up mail, they would heat a couple of stones (somewhere between three and ten pounds each) in the oven and wrap them in old blankets. These bundles were used to keep their feet warm on the long drive with horse and sleigh.

The rocks need to be found in a high and dry location, because waterlogged rocks can explode when they build up steam in a fire. Slate and shale must be avoided, too, because they are prone to explosion regardless of where they are found. Granite and soapstone make the best winterstones. Such stone is plentiful, and also strong, durable, and resistant to heat and chemicals.

Soapstone has been used since ancient times to make cooking pots and the internal linings of stoves. No other rock is capable of absorbing as much heat. Its higher density compared to typical rocks found on the ground enables it to release heat slowly, providing warmth for an extended period of time. Unlike other rocks, soapstone is non-porous, so it doesn't absorb water.

Winterstones are called "hot rocks" now and are sold as personal heaters for camping, as small stones for massage, and as cooking surfaces for adventurous chefs.

There's another alternative, though. Why not take a dog or cat camping or to bed to keep your feet warm? One animal per person should be just about right.

WOODBINE

"Woodbine" is one of two climbing plants with fragrant, creamy flowers, and any of several honeysuckles or Virginia creeper.

The English Woodbine cigarette, so often mentioned in novels of the early 1900s, was named after the plant.

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## Food for Thought

(quotes from the book)

I should be needing all the power I could muster, to pit against a woman; and this is harder to do than anything concerning men, as air is harder to see than a mountain.

The shore was haunted by these wretched women. They wept a great deal and said very little; it was apparent that they were accustomed, like beasts, to take what their lords handed out to them, whether alms or blows.

“King or not, young master, however much folks know, there’s always someone as knows more.”

... a garden, which is the chief of the arts of peace.

Yes, we must all grow old. Age is nothing but the sum of life.

He had discovered that if you failed to answer an awkward question, people rarely asked it twice.

Live what life brings; die what death comes.

Men fight for what is theirs.





## The Book of the Duke of True Lovers

Written in 1405, this charming tale of courtly romance follows the progress of a clandestine love affair between a young knight, the Duke, and a married noblewoman. *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers* is as readable and entertaining today as when it was written. It also provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of late medieval France, its society, fashion, and customs.

The author, Christine de Pisan, with her wonderful gift as painter-poet, takes us in imagination to a royal castle of the fifteenth century. There we see the daily life of its courtly circle, and, through the vivid descriptions of the sumptuous pageant, are able to take part in the three days' tournament, and in the merry revels which bring each day to a close. Truly, the author saw life largely and saw it well!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine de Pisan (1364-1430), born in Venice, Italy, became a prominent writer at the French court during the reign of Charles VI, writing on literature, morals, and politics, among other topics. She was noted for her unusually outspoken defense of women. Her writings remained influential and oft-printed through the 16th century, and her work returned to prominence during the mid-20th century.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Pisan was well educated, in large part thanks to her father, Thomas de Pisan, who served as astrologer to Charles VI until the king's death. Thomas encouraged Christine's learning and provided access to an extensive library. The French court was highly cultured and intellectual, and Pisan absorbed it all.

At the age of fifteen she was married to the king's notary and secretary, Etienne de Castel, a gentleman of Picardy, who also encouraged Christine's intellectual and creative pursuits. However, he died some ten years later. With her father dead and no surviving male relatives, Pisan was left as the sole supporter of her children as well as her mother.

Rather than remarry, Pisan turned to her considerable writing skill as a means to support her family. At first, she wrote love poetry, which gained her several influential patrons. Right from the beginning, she was highly involved in the production of her books, using only skilled women to do the work.

She wrote not only purely lyrical poetry, of extraordinary variety and abundance, but also sacred and scientific poems, moral and political prose works, and a kind of romantic fiction, of which *The Book of The Duke of True Lovers* is an example. That particular book, though, very likely had some historical basis.

The work for which Pisan is best known is *The Book of the City of Ladies*. In this work and its companion, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, Pisan created an extensive allegory in defense of women, marking her as one of the earliest Western feminist authors.

The central theme of the work is the creation of a great metaphorical city, constructed by and for heroic, virtuous women throughout history. In the book, Pisan's fictionalized self has a lengthy dialogue with three ladies who are the personifications of the great virtues: Reason, Rectitude, and Justice. Her rhetoric is designed to critique the oppression of women and the vulgar, misogynistic attitudes of male writers of the day. It included profiles and "examples" drawn from great women of history, as well as logical arguments against oppression and sexism. Additionally, the book exhorts women of all stations to cultivate their skills and to live well.

In 1410, Pisan published a treatise on warfare and chivalry, in which she discussed the concepts of just war, treatment of

troops and prisoners, and more. Her work was balanced for her time, adhering to the contemporary concept of war as divinely ordained justice but also critiquing the cruelties and crimes committed in wartime.

In 1415, Pisan retired to a convent and ceased writing, except in 1429, she wrote a paean to Joan of Arc, the only such French-language work written in Joan's lifetime. Christine de Pisan died at the convent in Poissy, France in 1430 at the age of 66.

Later scholars, most notably Simone de Beauvoir, brought Pisan's works back to prominence in the twentieth century, studying her as one of the earliest instances of women who wrote in defense of other women.

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ABOUT BECOMING A KNIGHT

The courtly life familiar to Christine de Pisan would have included knights and their code of chivalry. By this time, the process of entering knighthood had become formalized and knighthood a hereditary privilege of the nobility.

A noble boy of seven would begin training at the castle of another knight or lord, as a page or assistant to a squire. Physical fitness, combat training, and care for a horse were essential aspects of training, but he would also be instructed in falconry, hunting, dancing, and music, activities that befitted a nobleman. For the same reason, pages received lessons in religion, and were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic.

At about 14, the page would be formally promoted to a squire, whose training emphasized martial prowess, the code of chivalry, and developing physical strength. The word 'squire' literally means 'shield carrier' and it was a squire's duty to maintain his lord's weapons and armor. He might also learn games such as chess to develop strategic thinking. When the squire reached 21 and he could obtain knightly equipment, he'd be dubbed a knight.

The ceremony of dubbing might be highly elaborate on a great feast day or simply performed on the battlefield. A common element, however, was using the flat of a sword blade for a touch on the shoulder—which survives in modern times.

If the ceremony was to be part of a feast day, the squire would take a ritual bath, and be dressed in a piece of white clothing, symbolizing purity, a red robe, a sign of his nobility, and a pair of black shoes, symbolizing death. At the ceremony, the squire took his vows, and swore allegiance to his lord. Then the celebrations began, including a tournament the next day so the new knight could show off his skills as a warrior.

A knight enjoyed many privileges, including the right to own land, to bear arms inside a church, and to sit at the high table with other nobles and kings during banquets.

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## The Words

Two lists of weird and wonderful words follow. The first consists of those words which don't have a story, merely the necessary definition. The second list contains words with interesting stories or details.

## Definitions

**alack-a-day** — archaic word meaning “alas” or “woe is me!”

**avouch** — affirm or assert

**bade** — past tense of bid (to order)

**certes** — archaic for “certainly”

**dure** — an archaic form of endure

**erewhile** — a while before, some time ago, formerly

**eschew** — deliberately avoid using; shun

**gentlefolk** — persons of good breeding, high social status

**gladsome** — archaic form of glad, showing joy, cheerful

**herbage** — herbaceous plant growth

**hither** — an old word for here: “come hither”

**kinsfolk** — people descended from a common ancestor  
**lusty** — in a vigorous, merry or enthusiastic manner  
**malady** — a disease, disorder, or ailment  
**nigh** — near, in time or place: “Evening draws nigh.”  
**noise abroad** — spread gossip or secrets to other people  
**oft** — short for often, frequently, many times  
**sojourn** — a temporary stay, a brief period of residence  
**sup** — to eat or drink  
**tiring chamber** — “attiring” or “dressing” room

## Words with Stories

### ACCORD

As a verb, “accord” means:

- to grant or give, especially when due, or earned
- to arrive at an agreement (archaic)
- to give consent (obsolete)

As a noun, “accord” means:

- an agreement: “a peace accord”
- harmony

The rowdy behavior of early knights accords with Medieval views of fighting men, but such behavior wouldn’t have been in accordance with the later ideals of chivalry.

### ADO

“Ado” usually refers to fuss, agitation, concern, difficulty, or time wasted due to trivial troubles. It is most often found in the phrases “without much ado,” meaning “without much fuss,” or “without further ado,” meaning “without further delay.”

Shakespeare titled one of his plays, a romantic comedy about misunderstandings that arise out of gossip and rumor-mongering, *Much Ado About Nothing*. That phrase continues to turn up in modern writing for worry over something ultimately deemed to be insignificant.

### ANYWISE

“Nor could I in anywise sleep.”

“Wise” used in this manner means “way.” So “anywise” means “any way.” Couched in modern terms, the example would be “Nor could I in any way sleep.”

“Nowise,” then, means no way.

“Some wise” means in some way or to some degree.

“Such wise” means in such a way.

### ARCHER

“Then love, the playful archer, who saw my silent demeanor, and that I was inclined unto love, took the arrow with the which it is his wont to surprise lovers, and bent his bow, and drew it silently.”

An “archer” is a person who shoots with a bow and arrows, especially at a target for sport. The word comes from the Latin *arcus*, meaning bow.

In astrology, Sagittarius is depicted as an archer and centaur. They are associated with insight and truth telling. The arrows represent the sting of sharp truths.

But our hero is referring to Cupid, the god of sexual love in ancient Rome. He is usually shown as a naked boy with wings and holding a bow and arrow. He is also known as Amor and his Greek counterpart is Eros.

According to Roman mythology, Cupid was the son of Mercury, the messenger god, and Venus, the goddess of love. In Roman times, the winged “messenger of love” was sometimes depicted in armor, but no one is sure if that was intended as a sarcastic comment on the similarities between warfare and romance, or a reminder that love conquers all. Cupid was seen as a good spirit who brought happiness to all, but his matchmaking could cause mischief.

### AUGHT

“ ... for aught in the world, I should consent to soil mine honour.”

“Aught” is an archaic word meaning “nothing” and that’s how it’s used in the sentence above. But it can also mean “anything at all.” “Know you aught of this fellow, young sir?”

Or it can be used to say “for all.” “For aught I know, he could have left an hour ago.”

Isn’t English fun?

### BALLAD

A “ballad” is a song or poem that tells a story of adventure, of romance, or of a hero. It usually has stanzas of four lines with a rhyme on the second and fourth lines. It can be dramatic, funny, or romantic.

### BEHOVE

“Behove” (US spelling is “behoove”) is a duty, responsibility, or need for someone to do something. “It behoved him to act at once.”

The word, whichever way it’s spelled, is old-fashioned, but it’s not a fossil yet, since we both read and speak it now and again.

### BESEECH

To “beseech” is to plead with, to implore, entreat, or ask someone urgently to do something. “They beseeched him to stay.”

It definitely adds dramatic undertones to whatever you’re talking about. When your very life is on the line, it’s your last hope, and you have nowhere else to turn, it’s time to start beseeching.

### CAITIFF

“Caitiff” is an archaic word meaning a contemptible or cowardly person.

Caitiff is rare in contemporary use, but it has functioned since the 14th century as an adjective and also as a noun meaning “a base, cowardly, or despicable person” (as in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*: “O thou caitiff! O thou varlet! O thou wicked Hannibal!”).

### CASTING THE WEIGHT

The author does not provide an explanation for the expression “casting the weight,” presumably because anyone reading it in her day would have known what it meant. The phrase is used in the context of a group of people having a leisurely afternoon on a castle lawn.

There are two possibilities. The people on the castle lawn may have been playing bowls, also known as lawn bowls or lawn bowling, a game played either in teams or one against one.

The second possibility is that the person “casting the weight” may have been doing an exercise called “throwing the stone,” a one-handed throw of a stone from the shoulder. Men who went jousting needed to be fit for tournaments, and everybody wanted to be healthy to help ward off the Black Death.

Since they all come to greet the visiting hero, we suspect that the person “casting the weight” was doing an exercise rather than involved in a game of bowls.

### COMELY

“Comely” means pleasant to look at, agreeable, or suitable. Although now typically used to describe the appearance of human beings, it was once used of other things, such as fine clothing. Comely can be traced back to Old English words variously meaning “glorious,” “lively,” or “fine.” A similar word from the past would be “well-favored.”



### COMFIT

“Comfits” are candies consisting of dried fruits, nuts, seeds or spices coated with sugar candy. Licorice comfits (sometimes sold as “torpedoes”) are typically multi-colored, while almond comfits are usually white for weddings and may be brightly colored for other occasions.

A late medieval recipe for comfits is based on anise seeds, and suggests also making comfits with fennel, caraway, coriander, and diced ginger. These aniseed comfits seem to be a precursor of modern aniseed balls.

### DAIS

“My lady seated herself on the large raised dais.”

A “dais” is a low platform for a lectern, seats of honor, or a throne. Historically, the dais was a part of the floor at the end of a medieval hall, raised a step above the rest of the room. On this, the lord of the manor dined with his senior associates and friends and family members at the high table, while the other guests occupied the lower area of the room.

### DAME

“A matronly dame presided at the table.”

A “dame” may be:

- a woman of rank, station, or authority
- the wife or daughter of a lord
- a female member of an order of knighthood
- an elderly or mature woman

All of these are a far cry from the twentieth century “classy dame.”

### DAMSEL

“Damsel” is an archaic word for a young unmarried woman of noble birth.

If you've ever seen a young girl being chased by a rabid dog, then you've witnessed a damsel in distress! The word damsel is a shortened version of the French word, *mademoiselle*, which is what the French call a young woman who is not married — equivalent to the word "miss" in English.

### DANCE, GERMAN

"And so as to dance in the German fashion ... "

Dancing was one of the most regular parts of court celebrations and was almost essential at weddings and tournaments. It usually took place after supper or feasting, and could often continue until late in the night.

In the fourteenth century, a dance spread like wildfire from Germany to the rest of Europe. It is believed that this dance was the almain, a processional couple dance, with two distinct sections: dancing around a partner and the procession itself. It had a simple universal step.

### DESCANT

"Descant" has two meanings. One is to talk tediously or comment at length. "I have descanted on this subject before."

But the second meaning is most common. A "descant" was a form of medieval music in which one singer sang a fixed melody, and others accompanied with improvisations. The word in this sense comes from the term *discantus supra librum* (descant "above the book"), and is a form of Gregorian chant. The form had specific rules governing the improvisation of the additional voices.

Later on, the term came to mean the treble or soprano singer in any group of voices, or the higher pitched line in a song. Eventually, by the Renaissance, descant referred generally to counterpoint. Nowadays the counterpoint meaning is the most common.

### **DEVICE**

“I had caused an hundred rich liveries to be made according to my device.”

Today, “device” usually means a thing made or adapted for a particular purpose, like mechanical or electronic equipment, as well as a ploy or plan. In medieval days, it also meant the design or look of something, such as an emblem or heraldic design.

It was, perhaps, the origin of t-shirt messages.

### **DISCOMFORTED**

“He saw me thus discomforted.”

To “discomfort” someone means to make them ill-at-ease, anxious, distressed, embarrassed, or feel physical pain.

### **ESQUIRE**

Originally, an “esquire” was a knight’s shield bearer, who would probably himself in due course be dubbed a knight. In England, in the later Middle Ages, the term was used to denote a landed proprietor, and from this practice it became usual to entitle the principal landowner in a parish “the squire.” In Britain, “esquire” is by courtesy extended to all professional men and is used, abbreviated as Esq., as a form of address appended to surnames in place of the title Dr. or Mr.

### **EXERCISING WITH THE BAR**

The author used this phrase in the context of people spending leisure time in various ways on a castle lawn. Research has produced a few possibilities as to what that bar might have looked like, but no definite explanation.

“Bar” is defined as a relatively long, straight, rigid piece of solid material used as a fastener, support, barrier, or structural or mechanical member. Synonyms are: staff, stick, stave, and

crozier (a staff with a crook at the end). The word “exercising” suggests repetitive movement or manipulation.

Was it a javelin (a light spear)? A javelin is shaped like a bar, and is thrown. Javelins became less useful as weapons and more popular in sporting contests. It could have been the “long dart” (similar to a spear or javelin) but it’s rarely mentioned.

Leaden weights (plummets) don’t work, because they’re the wrong shape.

One site suggested that a poor student could keep a big, heavy stick in his room, and “wield it now with one hand, now with the other, as if in a scrimmage, until he is almost winded.”

The “big, heavy stick” brought to mind the quarterstaff, a long stick used for both offence and defense, as well as walking, since time immemorial.

The Medieval quarterstaff was cheap to produce, being made of ash, oak, or hawthorn. It was therefore most commonly associated with the lower classes, although nobles and knights also practiced with such weapons, increasing their weapons skills, strength, speed, and agility. This weapon was lethal and highly effective even against cutting weapons such as swords and daggers. Blows from quarterstaves could be alternated with striking, jabbing, bludgeoning, and thrusting like a spear. The style of attack could therefore change extremely quickly, making it difficult for the enemy to respond quickly. The weapon also had the advantage of its long length.

Being able to use a quarterstaff that way must have required much practicing of techniques. One would have to learn grip and stance, striking and blocking, sparring movements, footwork, and twirling, just the same as modern practitioners of Asian martial arts must do to become proficient.

So, was the “bar” in the phrase a staff, a javelin, a long dart, or a big, heavy stick?

## FAIR

“Fair” has several meanings:

- good-looking, attractive
- impartial and just
- light, blond hair or complexion
- average or acceptable quality

The word “fair” brings to mind the aphorism, “all is fair in love and war.” It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when it began. As far back as 1578, John Lyly wrote “anye impietie may lawfully be committed in loue, which is lawlesse.” Not until 1789 do we find the phrase used exactly as it is today.

## FERRET

Since the 14th century, “ferret” has meant a small, slinky mammal of the weasel family. These days, ferrets are often kept as pets (more than five million in the US), but previously they were used to hunt rabbits, rats, and other vermin, and to drive them from their underground burrows. By the 15th century, the verb “ferret” was being used for the action of hunting with ferrets. Today, we most frequently encounter the verb ferret in the phrase “ferret out,” meaning to “find and bring to light by searching.”

The name “ferret” is derived from the Latin *furittus*, meaning “little thief,” a likely reference to the common ferret penchant for secreting away small items.

A male ferret is called a hob; a female ferret is a jill. A spayed female is a sprite, a neutered male is a gib, and a vasectomized male is known as a hoblet. Ferrets under one year old are known as kits. A group of ferrets is known as a “business,” or historically as a “busyness.”

Ferrets were probably used by the Romans for hunting. Genghis Khan, ruler of the Mongol Empire, is recorded as using ferrets in a gigantic hunt in 1221 that aimed to purge an entire region of wild animals.

## **FETTERS**

“Then her gentle, laughing eyes, all fraught with loving fetters, so stirred my heart.”

Fetters are chains or manacles used to restrain a prisoner, typically placed around the ankles. Synonyms are: shackles, handcuffs, chains, and bonds.

The word can also be used metaphorically to mean a restraint on someone’s freedom to do something, typically considered unfair or overly restrictive. “He was fettered by tradition.”

## **FIREBRAND**

A “firebrand” can be a piece of burning wood used as a light or as a weapon, but the burning embers quickly sparked figurative uses for the term, too. By the early 14th century, firebrand was also being used for one doomed to burn in hell, and by 1382, English writers were using it for anyone who kindled mischief or inflamed passions.

The earliest meaning of “brand” itself is a piece of burning wood (such as one from a hearth or a burning building), a sense that has been in use since the 12th century, and which is the forerunner of the modern sense of the word meaning “a class of goods identified as being the product of a single firm or manufacturer.” It’s also used as a verb when we talk about branding cattle.

The sense of “firebrand” that is more familiar to most English speakers today is “one that creates unrest or strife (as in aggressively promoting a cause); an agitator.”

Someone who enjoys heating up the debate around a subject or lighting a fire under other people is a firebrand. “Fire” is their “brand.” Firebrands come in all shapes and sizes: conservative, liberal, militant, creative. Anyone who takes a strong, provocative stance and challenges people with heated rhetoric might be labeled a firebrand.

## FOLLY

“Folly” can be defined as:

- lack of good sense or normal prudence
- criminally or tragically foolish action
- evil, wickedness, lewd behavior (obsolete)
- a foolish act or idea
- an unprofitable undertaking
- a small picturesque building erected as a decoration

We don’t wish to be foolish, so we’ll concentrate on the last definition, a building in the form of a small castle or temple, perhaps, built as a decoration in a large garden or park.

Eighteenth-century English landscape gardening and French landscape gardening often featured mock Roman temples, symbolizing classical virtues. Other such garden follies imitated Chinese temples, Egyptian pyramids, ruined medieval castles or abbeys, or Tatar tents. Sometimes they represented rustic villages, mills, and cottages, to symbolize rural virtues. Many follies, particularly during times of famine, such as the Great Famine in Ireland, were built as a form of relief for the poor, to provide employment for peasants and unemployed artisans.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition says that the term began as “a popular name for any costly structure considered to have shown folly in the builder.” The connotations of silliness or madness in this definition is in accord with the general meaning of the French word *folie*. However, another older meaning of this word is “delight” or “favorite abode.”

Follies have no purpose other than as an ornament, but they were built or commissioned for pleasure, so perhaps the foolishness is only in the eye of the beholder.

## FRAUGHT

Today, “fraught” means full of unpleasant things such as problems, emotional distress, or dangers. For example, “His essay is fraught with errors.”

But its earliest meaning was “laden.” Fraught is related to the word freight, and comes from the Middle English “fraughten,” meaning “to load with cargo.” Something that was fraught was laden with freight.

### GAGE

“If you take not up this gage, then you love not this lady.” “Gage” is a variant spelling of “gauge,” with gauge now being the one most used.

Today, “gage” means measurement or the instrument for making them, or a description of measurement, for example, a “12-guage shotgun.” Or, “Surveys are a gauge of public sentiment.” And a fuel gauge tells us when to head for the nearest gas pump.

But, in medieval days, gage meant something deposited as a pledge of performance. An example is a glove, thrown down as a symbol of a challenge to fight.

### GAY

Today, “gay” means sexually or romantically attracted to people of one’s own sex. Back in medieval days, it meant lighthearted and carefree, merry, bright, lively, or vivacious.

The word comes from the Old French *gai*, meaning “full of joy or mirth.” That didn’t change until the 1600s, when the meaning evolved to imply that a person was unrestrained by morals and prone to decadence and promiscuity. A prostitute was described as a “gay woman” and a womanizer as a “gay man.” Brothels were commonly called “gay houses.”

### GOODLY

“A goodly company of ladies ...”

In medieval days, “goodly” meant attractive, excellent, or admirable. Now it can describe a large quantity or size. You



might bring home a goodly amount of spinach from the farmer's market.

Apples, yes. Spinach, never!

### GRACE

“Grace” has different meanings:

- ease and suppleness of movement
- courteous goodwill
- a charming or attractive trait or characteristic
- sense of propriety or right
- to do honor or credit to by one's presence
- a short prayer of thanks said before or after a meal
- mercy, pardon (archaic)

And, if a person is “gracious,” he or she is marked by kindness and courtesy, by charm, good taste, and generosity of spirit. In other words, possessing the quality of grace.

### GREYHOUND

A “greyhound” is a dog of a tall slender breed having a narrow head and a smooth coat. It was originally bred to hunt fast prey and is often used for racing. The dog is remarkable for keen sight and swiftness and is one of the oldest varieties known.

The greyhound's combination of long, powerful legs, deep chest, flexible spine, and slim build allows it to reach average race speeds exceeding 40 miles per hour. The true origin of the greyhound is unsure, but drawings have been found at a Turkish archeological dig dated circa 6000 BCE.

“Greyhound” is a slang term for a swift steamer, especially an ocean steamer. And, oddly, for a highball cocktail of vodka and grapefruit juice.

Sounds like the perfect setting for a cruising holiday.

## HEARKEN

“Hearken” is an old form of the word hark, meaning to listen attentively, or to inquire, to seek information.

Hearken, like hark, can also mean to look back to something in the past, though there is often a critical sense to the word. To hearken back to an old memory or event is usually to do it in a way that may be annoying to other people or perhaps even damaging or self-defeating to the one doing the hearkening.

In contemporary usage, hearken is more often used where one might expect hark, no doubt because of sound similarity. “The movie hearkens back to the sci-fi films of the 1950s.”

## IMPRESS

“Honor on my days impress.”

To “impress” is to press, stamp, or print something in or upon; to mark by pressure, or as by pressure; to imprint that material which bears the impression. It can also mean to affect deeply; to gain someone’s admiration or interest.

Think of the verb “impress” as “leaving a mark.” You might impress a print onto canvas, or impress an employer in a job interview. Whether that impression is good or bad is up to you.

## IN FEE

“So oft I hear how those ye hold in fee blame you no less.”

Today, we normally think of the word “fee” as the price for goods and services. But fee has an Old French origin in the word *fieu*, meaning “possession, holding, domain, or payment,” from the Medieval Latin *feodum*, “land whose use is granted in return for service.” In law, it means (of land) in “absolute ownership.”

The phrase “in fee” means in absolute and legal possession. So, to hold people “in fee” means that you own them.

## LANGUISH

To languish is to become pitiful or weak, pining away because you're sick, in love, or stuck somewhere. A prisoner might languish in jail, longing for her freedom.

Languish, like languid, is from the Latin word *languere* which means "to be weak or faint." Your houseplants might languish in a dark dry corner. A Romantic poet might languish on a velvet couch with the back of her hand to her forehead. People singing in operas love to languish.

My cat loves to languish, but she does it from an appreciation of relaxed contemplation, not because she's weak or pitiful.

## LIVERY

"Livery" is a distinctive costume or insignia worn by the retainers of a feudal lord, servants of a household, or by the members of a particular group. It can be considered a uniform.

Livery designates ownership or affiliation, and often includes elements of the heraldry relating to the individual or corporate body dressed in the livery. Alternatively, some kind of a personal emblem or badge, or a distinctive color, is featured.

During the 12th century, specific colors denoting a great person began to be used for both his soldiers and his civilian followers (the two often overlapped considerably), and the modern sense of the term began to form. Usually two different colors were used together (and often with a device or badge sewn on), but the ways in which they were combined varied with rank.

The term is also used to describe badges, buttons and grander pieces of jewelry containing the heraldic signs of an individual, which were given by that person to friends, followers, and distinguished visitors, as well as (in more modest forms) to servants.

### **MAIDEN**

The word “maiden” may describe:

- an unmarried girl or woman
- a woman or girl who is a virgin
- a type of guillotine, used in the 1500s and 1600s
- a horse that has never won a race
- the first voyage of a ship

These days, the word is rarely used, except when discussing the maiden voyage of a ship or plane: in both cases, the word indicates youth and inexperience.

### **MISTRESS**

Today, a “mistress” may be a woman who has a continuing sexual relationship with a man who is married to someone else. The word may also refer to a woman in a position of authority, control, or ownership, such as a wardrobe mistress or the headmistress in a school.

In medieval times, “mistress” was used as a title prefixed to the name of a married or unmarried woman. It was the neutral feminine counterpart to “mister” or “master.”

Finally, “mistress” may refer to a woman who owns or keeps an animal. “A cat sits in its mistress’s lap.” But, in the case of a cat, it isn’t the woman who is mistress, it’s the cat.

### **MOTTO**

“Then I chose a device and a motto, in the which was the name of my lady in such form that none could recognise it.”

A “motto” is a brief statement or maxim used to express a principle, goal, or ideal. It can be a sentence, phrase, or word, or prefixed to a chapter, or the like, suggestive of its subject matter.

Mottos (or mottoes) are usually found in written form (unlike slogans, which may also be expressed orally), and may stem

from long traditions of social foundations, or from significant events, such as a civil war or a revolution. One's motto may be in any language, but Latin has been widely used, especially in the Western world.

In the Middle Ages, most nobles possessed a coat of arms complete with a motto.

Today, a motto is something you might see on a t-shirt or bumper sticker — a short sentence or phrase that has meaning for that person. Some mottoes have to do with politics, religion, or other beliefs.

### NONCE

“For the nonce she was at mass.”

“Nonce” means for the present or on a particular occasion.

Nonce first appeared in Middle English as a noun spelled “nanes.” The spelling likely came about from a misdivision of the phrase “then anes.” (*Then* was the Middle English equivalent of “the” and *anes* meant “one purpose.”) The word was especially used in the phrase “for the nonce,” meaning “for the one purpose,” as in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*: “A cook they hadde with them for the nones.”

### PAVILION

“Pavilion” is used to mean a light, sometimes ornamental roofed structure, used for amusement or shelter, as at parks or fairs. It may be a temporary structure, such as a tent, or part of a building projecting from the rest. Pavilions are used by exhibitors at fairs and for bands and dances in a garden.

The word is from French *pavillon* and it meant a small palace. In Late Latin and Old French, it meant both ‘tent’ and ‘butterfly,’ because the canvas of a tent resembled a butterfly’s spread wings.

## PERIWINKLE

“She wore a chaplet of periwinkle.”

The plant called “periwinkle” is any of several evergreen herbs of the dogbane family, such as a European creeper (*Vinca minor*), widely cultivated as a ground cover and for its blue or white flowers. The plant is also called myrtle. As a trailing plant (*Vinca major*), it has large blue flowers and is used as a ground cover and in window boxes.

Periwinkle flowers are known for their stunning blue and purple colors, and come in different shades and varieties. The name “periwinkle” comes from the Latin word for “binding,” which refers to the plant’s use in traditional medicine as a wound healer in ancient times. The plant contains alkaloids that have been used in modern medicine to treat various illnesses, including cancer.

In Greek mythology, the periwinkle was associated with the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and was believed to have the power to bring love and fertility. In Celtic folklore, the flower was seen as a powerful symbol of rebirth and renewal, and was thought to have magical healing properties, as well as the power to help ward off evil spirits and protect against curses.

Another legend associated with periwinkle flowers is from the medieval era, where it was believed that the flower had the power to reveal hidden treasures.

The word is also used to mean a sea snail or a color, a light purplish blue.

## PIPES

“Many a player on the pipes was to be heard.”

“Pipes” is an abbreviation of bagpipes. The term “bagpipe” is equally correct in the singular or the plural, though pipers usually refer to the instrument as “the pipes,” “a set of pipes,” or “a stand of pipes.”

## PLAINT

“Much loved and coveted lady, deign, for pity’s sake, to hearken unto and to accept the sad plaint of your servant.”

A “plaint” might be an abbreviation for “complaint,” but more specifically means an audible expression of grief or sorrow, a lamentation.

## POUNCE

“So I took pen and paper, and pounce and ink ...”

“Pounce” is a fine powder, as of sandarac, or cuttlefish bone, once used to smooth and finish writing paper and soak up ink.

It was also used to mean the claw of a bird of prey and now is a verb: to spring or swoop with intent to seize someone or something.

## PRUDENT

If you are “prudent,” you are careful or wise in handling practical matters, exercising good judgment or common sense.

Prudent arrived in Middle English around the 14th century and traces back, by way of Middle French, to the Latin verb *providēre*, meaning “to see ahead, foresee, to provide (for).” *Providēre* combines *pro-*, meaning “before,” and *vidēre*, meaning “to see.” It is also the source of our “provide,” “provident,” “provision,” and “improvise.” *Vidēre* has many English offspring, including “evident,” “supervise,” “video,” and “vision.”

## RABBIT

A “rabbit” can be any of various long-eared, short-tailed, burrowing mammals of the family Leporidae, native to Europe and widely introduced elsewhere, or the cottontail of the Americas. It also refers to the fur of a rabbit or hare.

The verb “rabbit” means to hunt rabbits.

“Rabbity” is an adjective applied to a human who looks or acts like a rabbit.

As “Welsh Rabbit,” it was the name of a dish originating in Wales in the 1500s, popular among working class families, many of whom couldn’t afford to eat meat like rabbit. Instead, they’d cook Welsh rabbit — a Welshman’s version of “rabbit.” The name evolved to “Welsh rarebit” around the 1800s.

A traditional Welsh rarebit consists of a savory melted sauce of sharp cheddar; stout, beer or ale; butter; Worcestershire sauce and English mustard spread onto toast and grilled.

And “rabbit on” is a British phrase meaning to talk for too long about something that is not important or interesting.

### **RANK**

“...to each according to her rank.”

The noun “rank” refers to a position within a hierarchy, and to rank something is to put it in order — for example, a college might rank students in terms of their GPAs. In the military, an officer with a high rank will be in charge of soldiers of lower rank.

In social hierarchy, “rank” means a relative position. The phrase “the privileges of rank” is often used when referring to people having high social positions.

As an adjective, rank means offensive in odor or flavor, shockingly conspicuous, or high in amount or degree. “There’s a rank odor coming from him.”

### **REND**

“Ah, Death, Death, Death, to thee I make my prayer!  
Come, rend me from this dolorous world apart!”



The verb “to rend” means:

- split or tear apart by violence
- tear (hair or clothing) as a sign of anger, grief, or despair
- lacerate mentally or emotionally
- pierce with sound

### **REVEL**

As a verb, “to revel” means:

- take great pleasure or delight in something
- engage in uproarious festivities; make merry
- feast in a riotous manner

As a noun, a “revel” is a merrymaking, a feast, a carouse, a wild party or celebration.

### **ROUNDEL**

“Roundel” has several meanings:

- a form of poetry
- a circular logo in national colors on military aircraft
- a small ornamental circular window or other item
- a round plate of armor used to protect the armpit
- in heraldry, an emblem or device in the shape of a circle
- in dance, another word for roundelay

### **SALUTE**

To “salute” a lady (or anyone else) is to greet her with an expression of welcome, goodwill, or a sign of respect, such as bowing from the waist, or tipping one’s hat. In the military, a superior is saluted by raising the hand to the cap.

It also means to honor or praise someone formally and ceremoniously.

### **SLANDER**

“Slander” is the oral communication of false and malicious statements that damage the reputation of another. It means to defame, malign or vilify by tales or suggestions.

### SOLACE

“Solace” is consolation or comfort in sorrow, misfortune, or distress. It is something which cheers or gives relief.

Solace is a 14th century borrowing from the Latin *solari* means “to console.” And *solari* itself is from the Greek word *hilaros*, meaning “cheerful” and also the source of hilarious. For those of you who take solace in knowing the more obscure members of our language, we also present “solacer” (one who solaces) and “solacement” (an act of solacing or the condition of being solaced).

### SORE

“Then was I sore bewildered.” “Sore” in this instance is short for “sorely,” meaning extreme or intense.

Today, it means painful to the touch, causing misery or distress.

### TARRY

“Tarry with us a while.” “Tarry” means to linger, to wait, or stay in expectation, perhaps longer than planned.

Or it could mean covered in tar, but that’s not a pleasant thought.

### VARLET

If you heard someone say, “Varlet! Bring me my hauberk!” you could be sure you’d either traveled back in time to the Middle Ages or were at a Renaissance Fair. A varlet was similar to a squire, a servant and sidekick who could be relied on for help when a knight was just starting out. Later, varlet came to have the additional meaning of “rascal or rogue,” possibly influenced by Shakespeare, who frequently used it as an insult.

### VIRELAY

A “virelay” is a medieval French verse and song form, especially one in which each stanza has two rhymes, the end rhyme recurring as the first rhyme of the following stanza.

### VOUCHSAFE

“Vouchsafe me grace!”

“Vouchsafe” means:

- to grant or furnish, sometimes in a condescending manner
- to disclose or reveal: “refuse to vouchsafe an explanation”
- to grant as a privilege or special favor

Shakespeare was well acquainted with vouchsafe. The word, which came from Anglo-French in the 14th century, pops up 60 times in the bard's work. “Vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food,” King Lear begs his daughter Regan.

### WITHOUT

“And when we were without the walls, we mounted on to our horses.” “Without” here means “on the outside.”

It can also mean that something is absent or lacking. For example, “I went to bed without any supper.”

### WORTH

“The Princess was held of every one as beautiful, and of so great worth.”

“Worth,” in this case, is a measure of qualities that are esteemed or respected, whether moral or physical, as well as a person's usefulness, or importance. In other words, a measure of excellence.

The word is also used to mean having monetary or material value.

## Food for Thought

(quotes from the book)

Never is there fire without smoke, but there is often smoke without fire.

*(That's one statement which has never gone out of style.)*

Be assured that as soon as one sifts the matter to the bottom, one discovers all the mischievous perils which this amorous life entails.

*(Ah, love! Such sweet sorrow!)*

The man or the woman in whom resides greater virtue is the higher; neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex but in the perfection of conduct and virtues.

(Christine de Pisan, from *The Book of the City of Ladies*)



## The Canterbury Tales

“When April comes with his sweet, fragrant showers, which pierce the dry ground of March, and bathe every root of every plant in sweet liquid, then people desire to go on pilgrimages.” Thus begins the famous opening to *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of twenty-four stories written (probably on parchment, with a quill pen) in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer in the late 14th century. The tales (mostly in verse) are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims from all walks of life, as they travel from London to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.

The procession that crosses Chaucer’s pages is as full of life and as richly textured as a medieval tapestry. The Knight, the Miller, the Friar, the Squire, the Prioress, the Wife of Bath, and others who make up the cast of characters, vividly portray human emotions and weaknesses. Each of the tales is told in the voice of one of the pilgrims—and, as the tales progress, those pilgrims often react to each other, telling stories that insult the person who spoke before them or balancing a tale of moral instruction with a dirty joke. The stories often turn out to be retellings of familiar narratives; through his characters, Chaucer puts a human spin on even the most preachy of old tales, and finds humor everywhere he looks.

*The Canterbury Tales* is considered Chaucer’s masterpiece and is among the most important works of medieval literature for many reasons besides its poetic power and entertainment value, notably its depiction of the different social classes of the 14th century CE as well as clothing worn, pastimes enjoyed,

and language/expressions used. As the printing press had yet to be invented when Chaucer was writing, *The Canterbury Tales* has been passed down in handwritten manuscripts. When it is remembered that Chaucer wrote in English at a time when Latin was the standard literary language across western Europe, the magnitude of his achievement is even more remarkable.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Geoffrey Chaucer is widely regarded as England's greatest medieval poet and has been called the father of the English language. He was born in London, in about 1342, the son of a wine-merchant, and spent his life in royal government service.

In 1359, Chaucer (probably not yet twenty years old) joined the army of Edward III for the invasion of France, just one of many campaigns of what would be known as the Hundred Years War. During the campaign Chaucer was taken prisoner but released upon payment of a ransom — £16 of which was paid by the king himself. One might easily imagine that without his royal patronage the life of Geoffrey Chaucer might have been much briefer.

In the 1370s and 80s, Chaucer traveled widely on diplomatic missions for the king, especially in Italy. Chaucer's good service brought him a variety of rewards. In April 1374 Edward III rewarded Chaucer, at the St George's day celebrations at Windsor Castle, with a grant for a pitcher of wine a day from the king's butler.

In 1386, Chaucer was elected a Knight of the Shire of Kent (a member of the House of Commons). In the 1390s, he worked on his most ambitious project, *The Canterbury Tales*, which remained unfinished at his death. Chaucer died in 1400 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, probably because of his years of faithful service to the crown, rather than for his fame as a writer. Nonetheless, Chaucer's tomb became the first in the *Poet's Corner* where writers, including Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, and Alfred Tennyson have been interred.

The age of Chaucer is the first significant period in the literary history of England. It marks the beginning of a new era, new language, and new literature. Other books by Chaucer are *The Book of the Duchess* (1369), *The Parliament of Fowls* (1377–1382), *The House of Fame* (1379–1384), *Troilus and Criseyde* (1382–1385), *The Legend of Good Women* (1384–1386), and *The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse* (1399).

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Cast of Characters

We have abbreviated Chaucer's descriptions of his wonderful characters, due to space considerations and also presented them in modern English for ease of reading. However, to give you a small taste of Middle English, the first character, that of the KNIGHT, is done first in Middle English, then repeated in modern English.

A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys.
With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,

A KNIGHT there was, and that a worthy man,
Who from the time that he first began
To ride out, he loved chivalry,
Fidelity and good reputation, generosity and courtesy.
He was very worthy in his lord's war,
He had been at fifteen mortal battles,
And evermore had a stellar reputation.
With him there was his son, a young

SQUIRE, a lover and a lively bachelor.
He was embroidered, as if he were a meadow
All full of fresh flowers, white and red.

Singing he was, or fluting, all the day,
 Courteous he was, humble, and willing to serve,
 And carved before his father at the table.

A YEOMAN had he, and no more servants.
 And the yeoman was clad in coat and hood of green,
 A sheaf of peacock feathered arrows, bright and keen.
 He had a close-cropped head, and a brown face,
 A Christopher-medal of bright silver on his breast.
 He carried a horn; the shoulder strap was green;
 He was a forester, truly, as I guess.

There was also a Nun, a PRIORESS,
 And she was called Madam Eglantine.
 Full well she sang the service divine,
 Intoned in her nose very politely;
 And French she spoke full well and elegantly.
 She was so charitable and so compassionate
 She would weep, if she saw a mouse
 Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled.
 At meals she was well taught indeed;
 She let no morsel fall from her lips,
 Nor wet her fingers deep in her sauce.
 She wiped her upper lip so clean
 That in her cup there was seen no tiny bit
 Of grease, when she had drunk her drink.
 Her nose well formed, her eyes gray as glass,
 About her arm she bore of small coral
 A bracelet, adorned with large green beads,
 And thereon hung a brooch of bright gold,
 On which there was first written an A with a crown,
 And after, Amor vincit omnia.

There was a MONK, a very fine one,
 Who loved hunting.
 And when he rode, one could hear his bridle
 Jingle in a whistling wind as clear
 And as loud as does the chapel bell.
 He gave not a plucked hen for that text
 That says that hunters are not holy men,

Nor that a monk, when he is heedless of rules,
 Is like a fish that is out of water—
 This is to say, a monk out of his cloister.
 But he thought that same text not worth an oyster,
 And I said his opinion was good.
 He was a plump lord and healthy;
 His boots supple, his horse in excellent condition.
 And he loved a fat swan best of any roast.

A FRIAR there was, pleasure-loving and merry,
 With an assigned begging territory, a very solemn man.
 He was a lenient man in giving penance,
 Where he knew he would get a good gift.
 And everywhere, where profit should arise,
 He was courteous and graciously humble.
 His eyes twinkled in his head exactly
 As do the stars in the frosty night.
 This worthy friar was called Huberd.

A MERCHANT there was with a forked beard,
 And multi-colored clothes, who sat proudly on his horse.
 His opinions he spoke very solemnly,
 Concerning always the increase of his profits.
 He wanted the sea to be guarded at all costs.
 This worthy man employed his wit full well,
 There was no one knew he was in debt.

A CLERK there was of Oxford also,
 A scholar who long had studied logic.
 For he would rather have at the head of his bed
 Twenty books, bound in black or red,
 Of Aristotle and his philosophy
 Than rich robes, or a fiddle, or an elegant psaltery.
 Yet he had but little gold in his strongbox,
 And all that he could get from his friends,
 He spent on books and on learning,
 And diligently did pray for the souls
 Of those who gave him coin to attend the schools.

A SERGEANT of the law (attorney), prudent and wise,

Was also there, very rich in excellent qualities.
 For his knowledge and for his high renown,
 He had many grants of yearly income.
 He seemed such, his words were so wise.
 He was very often a judge in the court of assizes,
 No one could find a flaw in his writing,
 And he knew every statute completely by heart.
 He rode but simply in a multicolored coat,
 Girded with a belt of silk with small stripes.

A FRANKLIN, a free man, was in this company,
 His beard as white as a daisy.
 He loved a bite of bread dipped in wine in the morning,
 For he was Epicurus' own son.
 A householder, and a great host was he,
 He was Saint Julian in his country,
 Nowhere was any man better stocked with wine.
 In his house it snowed with food and drink.
 He had many fat partridges in pens,
 And many a bream and many a pike in his fish pond.
 He presided as lord and sire at court sessions;
 He was a member of parliament many times;
 He had been a sheriff, and an auditor of taxes;
 There was nowhere such a worthy landowner.

A HABERDASHER and a CARPENTER,
 A WEAVER, a DYER, and a TAPESTRY-MAKER,
 Were with us also and all clothed in one livery,
 Of a solemn and a great parish guild.
 Each of them well seemed a solid citizen
 To sit on a dais in a city hall.
 Every one of them, for the wisdom that he knows,
 Was suitable to be an alderman.

A COOK they had with them for the occasion
 To boil the chickens with marrow bones and spices.
 Well could he judge a draft of London ale,
 He knew how to roast, and broil, and fry,
 Make stews, and well bake a pie.
 But it was a great harm, it seemed to me,

That he had an open sore on his shin.

A SHIPMAN was there, dwelling far in the west;
 He rode upon a cart horse, insofar as he knew how,
 In a gown of woolen cloth that reached the knee.
 The hot summer had made his hue all brown;
 And certainly he was a boon companion,
 For he had drawn many a draft of wine
 While coming from Bordeaux, while the merchant slept.
 Of a nice conscience he took no care.
 If he fought and had the upper hand,
 He sent them home by water to every land.
 (His prisoners walked the plank.)
 Bold and prudent was he in his undertakings;
 His beard had been shaken by many a tempest.

With us there was a DOCTOR OF MEDICINE,
 In all this world there was no one like him,
 To speak of medicine and of surgery,
 For he was instructed in astronomy.
 He well knew how to calculate the planetary position
 Of his astronomical talismans for his patient.
 He knew the cause of every malady,
 Were it of hot, or cold, or moist, or dry elements,
 He had his apothecaries all ready
 To send him drugs and his electuaries,
 For each of them made the other to profit.
 He was clad all in red and in blue,
 Lined with taffeta and with silk.
 And yet he was moderate in spending;
 He kept what he earned in times of plague.
 Since in medicine gold is a restorative for the heart,
 Therefore he loved gold especially.

There was a good WIFE OF beside BATH,
 But she was somewhat deaf, and that was a pity.
 She had such a skill in cloth-making
 She surpassed them of Ypres and of Ghent.
 Her kerchiefs were very fine in texture;
 I dare swear they weighed ten pounds.

Her stockings were of fine scarlet red,
 Very closely laced, and shoes full supple and new.
 Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue.
 Husbands at the church had she had five
 Not counting other company in youth—
 But there is no need to speak of that right now.
 She had sailed many a foreign sea;
 And knew much about wandering by the way.
 She had teeth wide set apart, truly to say.
 She sat easily upon a pacing horse,
 And on her feet a pair of sharp spurs.
 In fellowship she well knew how to laugh and chatter.
 She knew, as it happened, about remedies for love
 For she knew the tricks and skills of that art.

A good man of religion was there,
 A poor PARSON of a town,
 But he was rich in holy thought and work,
 Who would preach Christ's gospel truly.
 And it is a shame, if a priest is concerned:
 To see a shit-stained shepherd and a clean sheep.
 Well ought a priest to give an example,
 By his purity, how his sheep should live.
 He did not rent out his church living
 And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
 And run to London unto Saint Paul's,
 But dwelt at home, and kept well his sheep,
 So that the wolf did not make it go wrong;
 Nowhere, I believe, is there a better priest.

With him there was a PLOWMAN, who was his brother,
 Who had hauled very many a cartload of dung;
 A hard worker and a good was he,
 Living in peace and perfect love.
 His tithes paid he completely and well.
 He rode in a sleeveless jacket upon a mare.

There was also a REEVE, and a MILLER,
 A SUMMONER, and a PARDONER also,
 A MANCIPL, and myself — there were no more.

The MILLER was a stout fellow indeed;
 He was very strong of muscle, and also of bones.
 At wrestling he would always take the prize.
 He was stoutly built, broad, a large-framed fellow;
 There was no door he would not heave off its hinges,
 Or break it by running at it with his head.
 His beard was red as any sow or fox,
 And moreover broad, as though it were a spade.
 Upon the exact top of his nose he had
 A wart, and thereon grew a tuft of hairs,
 Red as the bristles of a sow's ears.
 His nostrils were black and wide.
 His mouth was as big as a large furnace.
 He was a loudmouth and a buffoon,
 And that was mostly of sin and deeds of harlotry.
 Well could he steal corn and sell it three times;
 And yet he had a thumb of gold, indeed.

There was a fine MANCIPILE of a law school,
 Of whom buyers of provisions might take example
 For how to be wise in buying of victuals;
 For whether he paid cash or took goods on credit,
 Always he watched so carefully in his purchases
 That he was always ahead and in good state.
 He had more than three times ten masters,
 Who were expert and skillful in law,
 Of which there were a dozen in that house
 Worthy to be stewards of rent and land
 Of any lord that is in England,
 To make him live by his own wealth.
 And yet this Manciple fooled them all.

The REEVE was a slender choleric man.
 Well could he keep a granary and a storage bin.
 There was no auditor who could catch him out.
 He well knew by the drought and by the rain
 The future yield of his seed and of his grain.
 There was no farm manager, herdsman, nor other servant,
 Whose trickery and treachery he did not know;

They were afraid of him as of the plague.
 He was secretly very richly provided.
 And well knew how to please his lord subtly.
 He had his coat hitched up and belted, like a friar,
 And ever he rode as the last of our company.

There was a SUMMONER with us in that place,
 Who had a fire-red cherubim's face,
 For it was pimpled and discolored, with swollen eyelids.
 He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow,
 With black, scabby brows and a beard with hair fallen out.
 Children were afraid of his face.
 He well loved garlic, onions, and also leeks,
 And to drink strong wine, red as blood;
 Then would he speak and cry out as if mad.
 And when he had drunk deeply of the wine,
 Then would he speak no word but Latin.
 Always "Questio quid juris" would he cry.
 He was a fine rascal and a kind one;
 Secretly he knew how to pull off a clever trick.
 In his control he had as he pleased
 The young people of the diocese,
 And knew their secrets, and was the adviser of them all.
 He had set a garland upon his head,
 As large as if it were for the sign of a tavern.
 He had made himself a shield of a cake.

With him there rode a fine PARDONER
 Of Rouncivale, his friend and his companion,
 Very loud he sang "Come hither, love, to me!"
 This Summoner harmonized in a strong bass;
 There was never trumpet of half so great a sound.
 This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
 But smooth it hung as does a clump of flax;
 It seemed to him that he rode in the very latest style;
 He had sewn a Veronica upon his cap.
 A voice he had as small as a goat has.
 He had no beard, nor never would have;
 I believe he was a eunuch or a homosexual.
 Now in his pouch he had a pillow-case,

Which he said was Our Lady's veil;
 He said he had a piece of the sail
 That Saint Peter had, when he went
 Upon the sea, until Jesus Christ took him.
 He had a cross of metal covered with stones,
 And in a glass container he had pigs' bones.
 And with these relics, when he found
 A poor parson dwelling in the countryside,
 In one day he got himself more money
 Than the parson got in two months;
 And thus, with feigned flattery and tricks,
 He made fools of the parson and the people.
 He was in church a noble ecclesiast.
 He well knew how to read a lesson or a story,
 He must preach and well smooth his speech
 To win silver, as he very well knew how;
 Therefore he sang the more merrily and loud.

Now have I told you truly, briefly,
 The rank, the dress, the number, and also the cause
 Why this company was assembled
 In Southwark at this fine hostelry
 That is called the Tabard, close by the Bell.
 But now it is time to tell to you
 How we conducted ourselves that same night,
 When we had arrived in that hostelry;
 And after that I will tell of our journey
 And all the rest of our pilgrimage.

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## Words & Phrases

**ambler** — a saddle horse

**assize** — a judicial inquest, a trial

**assoil** — to absolve, to pardon

**astronomy** — Today, this means a system of knowledge about

celestial phenomena. But in medieval times, astronomy and astrology meant the same thing, divination of how stars and planets influence our lives. Then, astrology was generally considered a scholarly tradition and was common in learned circles, often in close relation with astronomy, meteorology, medicine, and alchemy. Kings or other nobles often had their own astronomers. The father of Christine de Pisan, who wrote *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers* in 1405, was astrologer to King Charles VI of France.

**a thumb of gold** — This refers to the proverb “an honest miller hath a thumb of gold,” which can mean honest millers are as rare as men with gold thumbs (or hen’s teeth!), or successful millers have their thumb on the scales to cheat. While the Miller described here is said to “have a golden thumb,” his propensity to steal indicates that he is not the rare honest miller. Instead, it probably refers to the method by which he triples his grain profits, by using his “golden thumb” to weigh down the scale that measures the weight of grain.

**bismoterred** — stained with rust

**boote** — remedy, advantage, help

**bourdon** — a technique of musical harmony, a drone function

**bracer** — archer’s wrist-guard

**bratt** — coarse cloak

**bretful** — brimful

**carp** — conversation, talking

**chantery** — the endowment of monks or canons specifically to say masses for one’s soul in perpetuity, thus in effect privatizing the work of intercession which was a basic function of the monastic life.

**chappelleine** (chapelayne) — the mistress of a household



**chapmen** — peddlers, merchants, dealers

**chevachie** — a raiding method for weakening the enemy, primarily by burning and pillaging enemy territory, including peasants and crops

**chevisance** — undertaking or enterprise, a business contract

**chivalry** — In medieval Europe, a code of ethics which ruled how the nobility would behave. It was also a religious, moral and social code which helped distinguish the higher classes from those below them. Evolving from the late 11th century CE onwards, essential chivalric qualities to be displayed included courage, military prowess, honor, loyalty, justice, good manners, and generosity, especially to those less fortunate than oneself. By the 14th century CE, the notion of chivalry had become more romantic and idealized, largely thanks to a plethora of literature on the subject and so the code persisted right through the medieval period with occasional revivals thereafter. The word “chivalry” comes from the French word *chevalier*.

**corages** — hearts, inclinations, feelings

**courtepy** — short overcoat

**croppes** — leaves, twigs, boughs

**crulle** — curled

**culpons** — locks or strands of hair

**dalliance** — sociable conversation, flirting, casual romance

**devise** — describe, conceive, imagine

**dign** — disdainful

**digne** — worthy, deserved, suitable, fitting, proud

**dike** — to dig ditches

**diocese** — the district under the jurisdiction of a bishop

**durst make avant** — dared to assert, to boast

**ecclesiast** — a member of the clergy

**electuary** — a drug mixed with sugar and water or honey to make it palatable

**farme** — a premium for a license to beg, in effect, rent

**farre** — farther

**ferne hallows couth** — far-off saints, known in sundry lands

**finch** — fleece, cheat

**foot-mantle** — a long garment worn to protect the dress in riding, a riding skirt

**forpine** — to waste away, as from anguish

**forword** — promise

**friar** — The word “friar,” (brother) arose with the creation of the mendicant (traveling/preaching) orders in the late Middle Ages, mostly by Franciscans or Dominicans. These brothers were not tied to monasteries, but went out among the people, to preach and to pray, to educate and to serve the sick.

**gaf** — gave

**gipon** (jupon) — a short tunic worn under armor

**gris** — a type of fur used for decoration

**guildsmen** — craftsmen joined in association to increase their bargaining power

**habergeon** — a short sleeveless coat of mail

**harlot** — a low, ribald fellow; the word was used of both sexes; it comes from the Anglo-Saxon verb “to hire.”

**herberow** — lodging

**holpen** — helped

**japes** — jests, tricks

**knobbles** — small protusions, lumps, or bumps

**lazar** — leper

**lodemanage** — pilotage, from Anglo-Saxon *ladman*, a leader, guide, or pilot; hence “lodestar” and “lodestone”

**lond** — land, country, kingdom, farmland

**lovedays** — days appointed for friendly settlement of disputes, often followed by sports and feasting

**love-knot** — elaborate knot (perhaps Celtic)

**low/lowly** — low, short, quiet, humble

**monk** — a member of a religious order living in a monastery, vowed to chastity, obedience, and poverty. The word “monk” comes from the Latin *monachus*, a word for hermits, and ultimately from the Greek *monos*, meaning “solitary.” Monks tend to remain living in one place (Benedictines actually take a vow of “stability”). Some examples of monastic communities are the Benedictines, the Cistercians, and the Carthusians.

**much and lit** — great and small

**ne (or né)** — not, nor

**neat** — cattle

**nightertale** — nighttime

**on the dais** — on the raised platform at the end of the hall, where sat at meat or in judgement those high in authority, rank or honor

**pardie** — interjection “By God!” or an adverb meaning “truly”

**pestilence** — plague

**plein** — full, complete

**pomely** — dappled, spotted

**pouraille** — poor people

**prickasour** — a hard rider

**pricking** — to ride or spur a horse

**purfil’d** — trimmed, especially with fur

**reyse** — go on a military expedition

**rede** — counsel, advise, interpret

**scalled** — scanty

**semicope** — a short or inferior kind of cloak

**shields** — coins, so called from the shields stamped on them

**sickerly** — surely

**smart** — pain or loss

**snibbe** — reprove, reprimand

**spiced conscience** — overly scrupulous or fastidious

**starf** — starved

**stot** — horse, steed

**strike** — strip (of flax)

**summoner** — one who brings persons accused of violating Church law to ecclesiastical court

**swinken** — to toil

**swoot** — sweet

**vavasour** — a landholder of consequence

**wanton** — a person who is licentious or promiscuous

**whelkes** — pustules

**wightly** — swiftly, nimbly

**wonning** — dwelling

**y-chaped** — mounted (trimmed, as a knife with brass or silver)

**yedding** — song, especially the song of a minstrel

**yeomanly** — workmanlike

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People & Places

Parvis — the portico of St. Paul's, which lawyers frequented to meet their clients

St Julian — the patron saint of hospitality, celebrated for supplying his votaries with good lodging and good cheer

Saint Loy — St. Loy, or Eloy is commonly known as the

patron of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and all workers in metals, also of farriers and horses.

Saint Paul's — cathedral in the City of London, England

Saint Thomas Becket — served as Lord Chancellor from 1155 to 1162, and then notably as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 until his death in 1170. His career was marked by a long quarrel with Henry II that ended with Becket's murder in Canterbury Cathedral. After his death, his tomb and relics became a focus for pilgrimage and he was made a saint.

Ypres and Gaunt (Ghent) — in Flanders, seats of cloth manufacturing

St. Benedict — the first founder of a spiritual order in the Roman church

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## Food for Thought

(Quotes from the book)

*Amor vincit omnia.* — Love conquers all. The rest of the phrase is *et nos cedamus amori*, which means “let us all yield to love.”

*Questio quid juris.* — I ask which law (applies). It is a legal term referring to the interpretation, application, or determination of a point of law. It focuses on the legal principles, rules, and doctrines that are relevant to a particular case or situation.

A voice he had as small as hath a goat.

*In principio* — in the beginning.



## Fabulous Feasts Medieval Cookery and Ceremony

*Fabulous Feasts: Medieval Cookery and Ceremony*, by Madeleine Pelter Cosman, celebrates the close relationship between food and culture in the Middle Ages by exploring every facet of medieval life as reflected in the food and feasting habits of people from that time period. Filled with a rich selection of tempting recipes that can be prepared by modern-day hosts, the book goes beyond most cookbooks in explaining the provenance and the practical reasons for certain cooking methods, ingredients, and related customs. In order to answer questions about how and why people ate what they did in the Middle Ages, Dr. Madeleine Cosman discusses topics ranging from medical nutrition, food safety, and food preparation to food presentation, table manners, and courtly magnificence. Leaving nothing out, from the ambiance down to the menu, Cosman transports the reader back to the Middle Ages through descriptions of humble meals among the common people as well as elaborate banquets at the King's Table.

*Fabulous Feasts* received nominations for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Madeleine Pelter Cosman: (1937 – 2006) was a prolific author, attorney, and lecturer whose areas of expertise include medical law & medieval life. She was a faculty member at City College, New York, and Director of the Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the City College of New York's City University.

**FROM THE INTRODUCTION:**

Foods are cultural insignia. Few indicators define a people so well as its food lore. Food taboos and food celebrations are important to a culture's notions of sacrament and sin, praise and punishment, deprivation and indulgence, firm discipline and sustained extravagance. Medieval England's courtly appetites for splendor are evident in cookery books, courtesy manuals, household and court documents, legal records, medieval texts, and, in surprising profusion, in works of art ranging from marginalia of prayer books through literary romances. In its food lore, medieval life seems to have been even more dramatic than its portrait in medieval art.

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Following are a few recipes from the book.

HANONEY (ONION AND PARSLEY OMELET)

INGREDIENTS:

6 eggs
1 small onion, coarsely chopped
1/2 cup fresh parsley, minced coarsely
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 Tablespoons butter for sautéing

METHOD:

Draw egg whites and yolks through a strainer.

Slowly melt butter in heavy skillet and gently sauté onions and parsley, until onions are golden yellow, not brown.

Pour on eggs, mixing them together with onions and parsley, and fry.

Flip the omelet, if desired, to crisp both sides, or serve as scrambled eggs. Salt to taste.

AMONDYN EYROUN (ALMOND OMELET)

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup ricotta cheese
8 tablespoons butter
3/4 cup slivered or coarsely ground almonds
2/3 cup oats
4 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
1/2 cup softened raisins
6 raw eggs
2 Tablespoons honey
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds, crushed
2 Tablespoons oil for sautéing

METHOD:

Place ricotta in a large bowl.

In a large, heavy skillet, melt half of the butter, and toast the almonds and oats until golden. Pour off almonds, oats, and butter into the ricotta and mix well.

Reserve skillet and any residual butter therein, for later.

Stir chopped hard-boiled eggs and raisins into the ricotta mixture.

Beat the raw eggs with honey, salt, and fennel. Stir the sweetened eggs into the cheese.

Heat remaining butter with oil in skillet. Pour mixture in to fry until golden, about 5 to 6 minutes on very low heat.

Turn the omelet if you prefer the eggs well done. Cut into individual wedges and serve hot.

HENNE DORRE (GOLDEN CARDAMON CHICKEN)

INGREDIENTS:

1 large roasting chicken cut into small serving portions
1/4 cup walnuts, coarsely ground
1/4 cup filberts, coarsely ground
4 Tablespoons butter, for sautéing
3 tart apples, cored and peeled
2/3 cup golden raisins
1/2 cup currants
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon fresh rosemary, finely crushed
pinch of thyme
7 cardamon berries (or 3/4 teaspoon crushed cardamon)
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup wine
1/2 cup chicken broth

GLAZE:

6 egg yolks
1/8 teaspoon saffron
2 Tablespoons honey

METHOD:

—Preheat oven to 350°F

—In a Dutch oven or shallow covered baking dish, sauté the chicken and nuts in butter until the meat is white. Leave in dish and remove from heat.

—Cut apples in thin slivers and mix with raisins and currants. Stir together all spices and salt, and mix with fruits. Distribute the spiced fruit amongst the chicken and nuts.

—Pour on mixed wine and chicken broth. Bake covered in slow oven for 45 to 55 minutes, until the chicken is tender. Remove from oven while preparing golden glaze.

—Turn oven to 400°F. Beat the egg yolks, saffron, and honey thoroughly. Evenly pour over chicken so as to coat each piece. Or use a pastry brush to “paint” each portion gold. Return to oven uncovered for 5 to 7 minutes to let endoring “set.” Serve warm.

COCKENTRICE: A MARVELOUS BEAST

The extraordinary “beasts” created by these instructions never were seen on land or sea. These chicken and pork visual delights were intended to startle as well as feed. The creation of such illusion foods was an important contribution of the medieval cook to the flamboyant art of the medieval feast.

INGREDIENTS:

1 suckling pig, about 7 pounds
 1 large roasting chicken, about 6 pounds
 6 egg yolks
 1/4 teaspoon powdered saffron
 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
 1/4 cup white wine
 1 tablespoon fresh parsley leaves, very finely chopped
 1 tablespoon flour

METHOD:

—Bake the chicken and the suckling pig separately at 375°F until tender; the chicken ought to take 2 hours, the suckling pig closer to 3.

—Cut the chicken in half with the incision running around the body behind the wings. The forward half is thus separated from the hind parts. Similarly cleave the pig so that the “head and shoulders” are cut from the back half of the animal.

—With a strong butcher’s thread or “carpet” thread sew the forward half of the chicken to the back half of the pig; sew the pig’s “head and shoulders” to the hind half of the capon.

Each is now a cockentrice! Turn oven up to 400°F.

—Lightly beat the egg yolks. Mix in the saffron and flour to make a thick fluid. Paint this on the suture lines as well as various parts of either the “face” or appendages — gold snout and gold nails were typical adornments.

—Return these marvelous animals to the oven so the gold “endoring” may set and the final creatures appear resplendent. Mix parsley in white wine with flour until the green color well permeates the fluid. If not a bright green, add two drops of green food coloring. Paint on “feathers” or designs for final embellishing of the cockentrice, your fancy guiding your hand.

FOUR AND TWENTY SINGING BLACKBIRD PIE OR LIVE FROG AND TURTLE PIE

The nursery rhyme *Sing a Song of Sixpence* suggests that the blackbirds were baked in a pie to make a dainty dish to set before the King. Actually, the pies were baked before the birds were tethered within! The Medieval method was essentially safe for the birds, some of which were raised for the very purpose of adorning either feast spectacles or, indeed, the feast trenchers. Wind-up, mechanical “birds,” which also were popular in the Middle Ages as feast adornments, medieval automata, and table toys were exceedingly popular amongst the nobility and those who aped their habits.

INGREDIENTS:

Butter for greasing baking pan

2 or more cups of dried beans or such a “heavy” cereal as Grape Nuts

Live tethered birds or frogs or turtles or wind-up animals

2 egg yolks

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

METHOD:

Prepare the largest pie shell and top lid which your pastry pans and oven will accommodate. A “spring-mold pan” or one allowing easy removal of the pie crust is best to use.

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Very lightly grease the large pie pan, then dust with flour.
3. Reserving sufficient dough for a top crust, press in a reasonably thick bottom pie crust.
4. Fill the pie shell with dried beans, or other reusable filler, to weight down the crust as it bakes to avoid bubbling. Apply and carefully seal the upper crust to the lower.
5. Glaze with egg yolk mixed with cinnamon.

6. Bake 40 minutes at 425°F or until golden brown.
7. When cool, carefully gain access to the bottom crust and cut a large hole 3-to-4 inch diameter — through which remove all bean or cereal filler, reserving the piece of cut crust.
8. Into the well-cooled shell, insert the live or wind-up animals immediately before serving. If possible, replace the pastry cut so as to “close the hole.”
9. Scrupulously carefully, cut around the circumference of the crust at time of serving, about one quarter way around the pie. Equally gently, cut toward the center, taking extreme care not to touch the animals (or mechanical toys). Lift out the upper-crust portion.
10. The birds or frogs will happily “liberate” themselves on the table in order to amaze and amuse the feasters.
11. This pie makes a dramatic finale to a formal feast.

That’s if you don’t mind frogs bouncing through your dessert.

PARSLEY BREAD

One of the few extant bread recipes, this makes excellent eating fresh and is splendid, when aged, for trenchers.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 packages active dry yeast
- 1 3/4 cups warm water
- 6 Tablespoons honey
- 7 to 8 cups (or more) unbleached white wheat bread flour
- 6 small whole eggs plus one yolk
- 1 2/3 cups currants, softened in warm water
- 1 2/3 Tablespoons coarse salt
- 5 Tablespoons melted butter or oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried rosemary

1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil

2/3 cup finely chopped fresh parsley

1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon

Several drops green vegetable color

Butter for greasing bowls and cookie sheet

METHOD:

1. Sprinkle yeast on 1/2 cup of the warm water; stir in honey. Let proof for 5 minutes.

2. Add remaining warm water; beat in about 2 & 1/2 to 3 cups of flour. Beat with wooden spoon for about 200 strokes. Cover with damp towel, put in warm place, and allow this sponge to rise for 30-45 minutes, or until doubled.

3. Stir down.

4. Beat 5 whole eggs plus one yolk. Stir in currants. (Or add them later, before rise in Step 8.) Beat in salt and melted butter or oil. Mix into the dough.

5. In a mortar, crush the dried herbs and chopped parsley to a paste. Mix in cinnamon. Add to batter and beat well. (Bread should be a delicate green hue. If color from parsley isn't strong enough, add green food color — sparingly.) Add remaining flour first with a spoon, then with hands, until dough comes away from the side of the bowl.

6. Turn out onto lightly floured board or marble and knead until smooth, shiny, and elastic, about 10-12 minutes, adding small amounts of flour if necessary.

7. Place in buttered bowl; cover with damp towel. Let rise in warm place until doubled in bulk, about 50 minutes.

8. Punch down. Cover; let rise again until doubled in bulk, about 30 minutes. (This rise, though unnecessary, gives the bread a finer texture.)

9. Punch down. Turn out onto floured surface. Let rest for five minutes. Shape into one or two free-form curls or twists. Place on buttered cookie sheet. Cover lightly with damp towel and let rise in warm place to double, about 25 minutes.

10. Preheat oven to 375°F. Brush loaf or loaves with remaining whole egg, beaten. Bake for about 50 minutes, or until nicely browned and loaf sounds hollow when rapped on top and bottom. Cool on rack.

11. Serve with hard cheese, fresh butter, and white wine.

TROYCREM (TRI-CREAM)

Several variations of this colorful dessert appear in medieval cookbooks, calling for cream or “cruddled milk,” or a light “loose” cheese such as ricotta. It is particularly delightful with ricotta thinned with milk or sour cream; or blend the colors and tastes with yogurt; or with whipped heavy cream.

INGREDIENTS:

3 pints of heavy cream
(or yogurt, or ricotta cheese thinned with milk or cream)
3 Tablespoons dark-brown spicy mustard
3 Tablespoons red-raspberry preserves
3 Tablespoons honey

(For another variation in taste and color:

3 Tablespoons quince preserves
3 Tablespoons honey)

METHOD:

1. In one pint of cream, mix the mustard; in a second, mix the red-raspberry preserves; leave the third plain and white.
2. Whip each cream until it thickens.
3. Arrange all three side by side in a large attractive serving dish, making three “stripes.”
4. With a knife dipped once in warm water, gently swirl or “enmarbleize” until a pleasant design as well as an interesting blend of colors is achieved. Drizzle honey over surface, embellishing the design of the creams.
5. When serving, each portion in a small bowl ought to allow tasting of all three juxtaposed creams, the gold, red, and white colors artistically set forth.

The quince-and-honey version, though a bit less colorful, is no less tasty. The russet quince is well complemented by the golden honey and plain white creams.

FRUYTE FRITTOURS (PARSNIP AND APPLE FRITTERS)

INGREDIENTS:

4 parsnips
4 large firm apples
2 cups boiling water
2 cups flour
2 eggs
2 Tablespoons ale (more as needed)
1/2 teaspoon dill seeds, crushed
1/4 teaspoon salt
4 Tablespoons butter
4 Tablespoons oil
4 Tablespoons brown sugar

GARNISH:

Red anise or red licorice

METHOD:

1. Pare the apples; cut them in quarters and seed, then cut in sixteenths or until moon-shaped slices remain firm, not flimsy. Trim parsnips; cut longitudinal strips of white flesh, making "bars" (about 1/2 inch thick).
2. Parboil parsnip bars for 3 minutes. Drain, and reserve.
3. Beat eggs. Add eggs, ale, dill, and salt to flour and stir until evenly blended. (Add more ale if mixture is too dry; it should be the consistency of thick pancake batter.)
4. Generously coat apple slices and parsnip strips with batter.
5. Sauté in hot butter and oil combination in skillet until golden brown.
6. Remove to rack.
7. Strew each "frittour" with brown sugar while still warm.
8. Arrange crescents and bars artistically on platter, garnished with red anise or red licorice.

At the end of this chapter are a few recipes from other sources.

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## **ABOUT MEDIEVAL FOOD**

Medieval society was highly stratified. In a time when famine was commonplace and social hierarchies were often brutally enforced, food was an important marker of social status in a way that has no equivalent today in most developed countries. Society consisted of commoners (the working classes), the clergy, and the nobility. The relationship between the classes was strictly hierarchical, with the nobility and clergy claiming worldly and spiritual overlordship over commoners. One was expected to remain in one's social class and to respect the authority of the ruling classes. Political power was displayed not just by rule, but also by displaying wealth. Nobles dined on fresh game seasoned with exotic spices, and displayed refined table manners. Rough laborers could make do with coarse barley bread, salt pork, and beans and were not expected to display etiquette.

Medical science of the Middle Ages had a considerable influence on what was considered healthful and nutritious among the upper classes. All foodstuffs were classified on scales ranging from hot to cold and moist to dry, according to the four bodily humors theory proposed by Galen that dominated Western medical science from late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages.

## **WHAT DID PEOPLE EAT?**

People ate real food, since junk food didn't exist. Peasants might eat bread, berries, root and green vegetables, fruit gathered nearby, and meat if they could afford or catch it. Many would have salted, smoked, or dried meat. Stew would have been popular, a dish that bubbled in a big kettle over the fire and was added to day by day. A wide variety of freshwater and saltwater fish was also eaten. The wealthy, of course, ate a much greater variety of foods, though slow transportation methods made long-distance trade of many foods very expensive, and perishables couldn't be transported at all.

Foods that are common today, like potatoes, rice, kidney beans, cacao, vanilla, tomatoes, chili peppers, and maize were not introduced to Europeans until the 16th century. Even so,

it often took considerable time (sometimes centuries) for the new foodstuffs to be accepted by society at large.

Therefore, bread was the most important staple during the Middle Ages in Europe. Barley, oats, and rye were eaten by the poor while the more expensive wheat was eaten by nobility. These were consumed as bread, porridge, gruel, and pasta by people of all classes.

The custom of leavening the dough by the addition of a ferment was not universally adopted. The Vikings certainly made use of wild yeasts, raising agents such as buttermilk and sour milk, and the leftover yeast from brewing. Flour could be made from nuts (including acorns) or pulses (peas and beans), and even from tree bark. The inner layer of birch bark, dried and ground, produces a flour with a sweet flavor and is highly nutritious.

Another common sight at the medieval dinner table was the frumenty, a thick wheat porridge often boiled in a meat broth and seasoned with spices. Porridges were also made of every type of grain. Pies filled with meats, eggs, vegetables, or fruit were common throughout Europe, as were turnovers, fritters, doughnuts, and many similar pastries. By the Late Middle Ages, biscuits (cookies in the US) and especially wafers, eaten for dessert, had become high-prestige foods and came in many varieties.

Vegetables such as cabbages, chard, onions, garlic, and carrots were common. Various legumes, like chickpeas, fava beans, and field peas were also common and important sources of protein, especially among the lower classes.

Cheese was an important protein, especially for common people. While most other regions used oil or lard as cooking fats, butter was the dominant cooking medium in these areas. Olive oil was ubiquitous in Mediterranean cultures, but remained an expensive import in the north where oils of poppy, walnut, hazel, and filbert were the most affordable alternatives. Almost universal in middle and upper class

cooking all over Europe was the almond, used in the highly versatile almond milk as a substitute in dishes that otherwise required eggs or milk.

While all forms of wild game (including hedgehog and porcupine) were popular among those who could get it, most meat came from domestic animals. Rabbits were a rare and highly prized commodity. In England, they were deliberately introduced by the 13th century and their colonies carefully protected. A wide variety of birds were eaten, including pheasants, swans, peafowl, quail, partridge, storks, cranes, pigeons, larks, finches, and just about any other wild bird that could be captured.

### **SPICES:**

Spices were among the most luxurious products available in the medieval period, the commonest being black pepper, cinnamon, cumin, nutmeg, ginger, and cloves. They all had to be imported from Asia and Africa, which made them extremely expensive, and gave them social cachet such that pepper, for example, was hoarded, traded and conspicuously donated in the manner of gold bullion. Sugar was considered to be a type of spice due to its high cost. Most dishes employed a combination of several different spices.

The popular argument that spices were employed to disguise the flavor of spoiled meat is not supported in historical fact and contemporary sources. Fresh meat was available any time for all those who could afford it. The preservation techniques available were crude by today's standards, but perfectly adequate. The astronomical cost and high prestige of spices, and thereby the reputation of the host, would have been effectively undone if wasted on spoiled meat and other poorly handled foods.

Common herbs such as sage, mustard, and parsley were grown and used in cooking, as were caraway, mint, dill, and fennel. Many of these plants grew wild or were cultivated in gardens. Anise was used to flavor fish and chicken dishes, and its seeds were served as sugar-coated comfits.

Wine, verjuice (the juice of unripe grapes or fruits), vinegar, and the juices of various tart fruits were almost universal and a hallmark of late medieval cooking. Equally common, and used to complement the tanginess of these ingredients, were (sweet) almonds. They were used in a variety of ways: whole, shelled or unshelled, slivered, ground and, most importantly, processed into almond milk.

Salt was indispensable, since salting and drying was the most common form of food preservation. Salt was present during more elaborate or expensive meals. The richer the host, and the more prestigious the guest, the more elaborate would be the container in which it was served and the higher the quality and price of the salt. Wealthy guests were seated “above the salt,” while others sat “below the salt.” The rank of a diner also decided how finely ground and white the salt was. Salt for cooking, preservation or for use by the common people was coarser. Sea salt, or “bay salt,” in particular, had more impurities, and was described in colors ranging from black to green. Expensive salt, on the other hand, looked like the standard commercial salt common today.

### **SWEETS AND DESSERTS:**

The term “dessert” comes from the Old French *desservir*, ‘to clear a table,’ and originated during the Middle Ages. It would typically consist of dragées and mulled wine accompanied by aged cheese, and by the Late Middle Ages could also include fresh fruit covered in honey, sugar, or syrup and boiled-down fruit pastes. Sugar’s reputation as an exotic luxury caused it to appear in elite contexts, accompanying meats and other dishes that to modern taste are more naturally savory. The English chefs also used flower petals such as roses, violets, and elder flowers.

### **DRINKS:**

People drank water, if available from a well or spring, but avoided in cities where water sources were likely to be contaminated by sewerage. Tea and coffee were not available in Europe before the late 1500s. Fresh milk was an option, but was more commonly converted to cheese and butter.

Beer, however, was drunk by everyone at every meal and regarded as food. Workers were often paid with jugs of beer. Made simply from grain, water, and yeast, beer was the first alcoholic beverage known to civilization. Originally, bark or leaves were used to preserve beer and it wasn't until the 1500s that records show hops being used for the purpose.

Ale was an important source of nutrition, particularly small beer, also known as table beer or mild beer, which was highly nutritious, contained just enough alcohol to act as a preservative, and provided hydration without intoxication. Small beer would have been consumed daily by almost everyone, with higher-alcohol ales reserved for recreational purposes. Cider, made from fermenting fruit, usually apples, was an alternative.

Wine, often spiced or mulled, was commonly drunk and regarded as a prestigious and healthy choice. Consumption of wine in moderation was believed to aid digestion, generate good blood and brighten the mood. For the poorest (or the most pious), watered-down vinegar would often be the only available choice. Pomegranate, mulberry and blackberry wines, perry, and cider were popular, as were many of the variants of mead.

Wine, like beer, was sometimes used to pay for services rendered. Geoffrey Chaucer was granted "a gallon of wine daily for the rest of his life" by King Edward III of England.

Distillation was believed by medieval scholars to produce the essence of the liquid being purified, and the term *aqua vitae* (water of life) for hard liquor was used as a generic term for all kinds of distillates.

### **HOW FOOD WAS EATEN:**

Everyone carried a knife for cutting meat, or spearing vegetables. Spoons (carved from wood) were used for dishes like stew and pudding, but forks were not in use for eating until after the middle ages. Mostly the hands were used. In wealthy homes, elaborate rituals were observed for finger-eating.

Certain fingers were extended while eating specific foods to allow grease-free fingers available for the next dish, as well as for dipping fingers into condiments and spices. This use of fingers as implements explains in part the prevalence of easily handled foods at feasts, the meat- and fish- and fruit-filled pastries, breads, sweet tarts, and individual pies.

In a noble's home, the dining table was set with a white cloth. Each diner had two knives, (some with serrated tips), a spoon (perhaps of gold or silver), a salt cellar, a napkin (tossed onto the left shoulder or draped over the left forearm), bread, and a wood or pewter plate. Before the meal and between courses, shallow basins and linen towels were offered to guests so they could wash their hands. Shared drinking cups (perhaps of glass or metal) were common even at lavish banquets for all but those who sat at the high table.

#### **FOOD PRESERVATION:**

Methods were basically the same as had been used since antiquity, and did not change much until the invention of canning in the 19th century. The most common method was drying. In warm climates this was mostly achieved by leaving food out in the sun, and in the cooler northern climates by exposure to strong winds, or in warm ovens, cellars, and attics. Smoking, salting, brining, conserving, or fermenting also made food keep longer. Butter, for example, tended to be heavily salted. Vegetables, eggs, or fish were also often pickled in tightly packed jars, containing brine and acidic liquids (lemon juice, verjuice, or vinegar). Food could also be "sealed" by cooking it in honey, sugar, or fat, in which it was then stored.

#### **FOOD PREPARATION:**

All types of cooking involved the direct use of fire. Kitchen stoves did not appear until the 18th century, and cooks had to know how to cook directly over an open fire. Ovens were used, but they were expensive to construct and existed only in large households and bakeries, or shared by a community to ensure that the essential bread-baking could occur. But for most people, almost all cooking was done in simple stewpots, since this was the most efficient use of firewood and did not

waste precious cooking juices, making potages and stews common dishes.

In most households, including those of the wealthy, cooking was done on an open hearth in the middle of the main living area, to make efficient use of the heat. Towards the Late Middle Ages a separate kitchen area began to evolve, in order to keep the smells and noise of cooking away from guests.

Many basic variations of the cooking utensils available today, such as frying pans, pots, kettles, and waffle irons, already existed, although often too expensive for poor households. There were also cranes with adjustable hooks so that pots and cauldrons could easily be swung away from the fire to keep them from burning or boiling over. To assist the cook there were assorted knives, cooking forks, stirring spoons, ladles and graters.

The staff of huge noble or royal courts occasionally numbered in the hundreds. In the outbuildings were candle makers, slaughterers, hunters, grooms, soldiers, hawkers, falconers, kennel keepers, and gardeners. In the castle, there were pantlers, bakers, waferers, sauciers, larderers, carvers, page boys, milkmaids, butlers, and numerous scullions. While a peasant household often made do with firewood collected from the surrounding woodlands, a castle kitchen had to cope with the logistics of daily providing at least two meals for several hundred people. Guidelines on how to prepare for a two-day banquet include the recommendation that the chief cook should have at hand at least 1,000 cartloads of good, dry firewood and a large barnful of coal.

#### **RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE:**

The church had great influence on eating habits; consumption of meat was forbidden for a full third of the year for most Christians. In much of Europe, Fridays were fast days, and so were various other days and periods, including Lent and Advent. The intention was to teach a spiritual lesson in self-restraint through abstinence. During particularly severe fast days, the number of daily meals was also reduced to one. Even

if most people respected these restrictions and made penance when they violated them, there were also numerous ways of circumventing them. As writer Bridget Ann Henisch says:

“It is the nature of man to build the most complicated cage of rules and regulations in which to trap himself, and then, with equal ingenuity and zest, to bend his brain to the problem of wriggling triumphantly out again. Lent was a challenge; the game was to ferret out the loopholes.”

### **MONASTERIES:**

Monks ate very well. At Westminster Abbey in the late 15th century, each monk would have been allowed each day: 2 1/4 pounds of bread; 5 eggs (except on Fridays and in Lent), 2 pounds of meat four days per week, except in Advent and Lent; and 2 pounds of fish, three days per week and every day during Advent and Lent. Also, each monk was allowed one imperial gallon of beer per day. All of which explains why monks, consuming from 4,500 to 6,000 calories per day, were often obese, and suffered from conditions like arthritis.

### **PROFESSIONAL COOKING:**

Most people lived in rural communities, growing and cooking their own food. In large towns, people needed to buy food and many lived in cramped conditions without access to a kitchen or even a hearth. Food from vendors was in such cases the only option.

Cookshops sold ready-made hot food or offered cooking services while the customers supplied some or all of the ingredients. Travelers, such as pilgrims en route to a holy site, made use of professional cooks to avoid having to carry their provisions with them. For the affluent, there were many specialists that could supply various foods and condiments. For example: cheesemongers, sauciers, waferers, and pie bakers. They could also hire professionals to supplement their own kitchen or staff when hosting a major banquet.

### **COOKBOOKS:**

These began to appear towards the end of the 13th century. It's unlikely they were used as cookbooks are today, as a step-



by-step guide through the cooking procedure. Few in a kitchen would have been able to read, and working texts have a low survival rate.

The recipes in these cookbooks were often brief and did not give precise quantities. Cooking times and temperatures were seldom specified since accurate portable clocks were not available and all cooking was done with fire. Professional cooks were taught their trade through apprenticeship and practical training, working their way up in the highly defined kitchen hierarchy. A medieval cook employed in a large household would have been able to plan and produce a meal without the help of recipes or written instruction.

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And, speaking of cookbooks, here are a few more old recipes.

MANCHET BREAD

(From <https://williamrubel.com>)

This is one of the earliest and most important English bread recipes. *The Good Huswives Handmaide for the Kitchen* was published in England in 1594. It is one of the first English cookbooks. The anonymous author offers a wide range of recipes, mostly simple, and most reasonably accessible to modern readers. The book includes two recipes for a white bread called manchet. Manchet seems to have been the best of the white breads. It was made in private homes, not sold by bakers. The “fine manchet” is the first of the two white bread recipes in *The Good Huswives Handmaide for the Kitchen*.

Transcription: Take a half a bushel of fine flour twice boulded (sifted), and a gallon faire luke warm water, almost a pint of yeast in the form of barm, then temper all these together, without any more liquor, as hard as ye can handle it: then let it lie half an hour, then take it up, and make your Manchets, and let them stand almost an hour in the oven.

Salt is not mentioned in the recipe, but in the author's other manchet recipe, it says, "an eggshell's worth of salt."

The original recipe ends as follows: "Memorandum, that of every bushel of meal may be made five and twenty cast of bread, and every loaf to weigh a pound beside the chisel." It seems to me this is likely an older commercial form of recipe notation. Unfortunately, we do not know what a "cast" is beyond it having been a measure of bread given as a food allowance. This may have been around 1.5 pounds worth of bread.

If you want to try making manchet bread in a smaller quantity, here is a recipe from <https://bakerrecipes.com>.

INGREDIENTS:

1 package yeast
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup warm water
1 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups white whole-wheat flour
4 tablespoons softened butter

DIRECTIONS:

Dissolve the yeast in half the warm water. Put the two types of flour and the salt into a bowl; make a well in the flour and add all the water and butter. Mix well. Add more flour if the mixture is too sticky to knead. Knead for 10 minutes until smooth and elastic and then put into a greased bowl, covered with a cloth. Let the dough rise for 1 to 1 1/2 hours, or until it has doubled in bulk.

Punch it down and shape it into rather flat, round loaves. Put these onto a greased baking sheet, cover with a cloth, and leave to rise for 45 minutes (or until twice the size). The loaves can be brushed with egg wash, to 'endore' them before baking, and the tops can be slashed and pricked with a fork. Bake at 375F for 35 to 40 minutes.

Yields 1 loaf.

The following recipes are courtesy of *www.theoldfoodie.com*.

TO BAKE A PIGGE

Take your Pig and flea (skin) it, and draw out all that clean which is in his bellye, and wash him clean, and perboyle him, season it with Cloves, mace, nutmegs, pepper & salt, and so lay him in the paste with good store of Butter, then set it in the Oven till it be baked inough. (*A book of cookrye. Very necessary for all such as delight therin.1591*)

WELSH ALE

Pour forty-two gallons of water, hot, but not quite boiling, on four bushels of malt, cover, and let it stand three hours. In the mean time infuse 1 1/2 pounds of hops in a little hot water, (2 pounds if the ale is to be kept five or six months), and put water and hops into the tub, and tun the wort upon them, and boil them together three hours. Strain off the hops, and keep for the small beer. Let the wort stand in a high tub till cool enough to receive the yeast, of which put two quarts of ale, or if you cannot get it, of small beer yeast. Mix it thoroughly and often. When the wort has done working, the second or third day, the yeast will sink rather than rise in the middle, remove it then, and turn the ale as it works out, pour a quart in at a time, and gently, to prevent the fermentation from continuing too long, which weakens the liquor. Put a bit of paper over the bunghole two or three days before stopping up.

(*A New System of Domestic Cookery (1808) By Maria Rundell*)

WELSH NECTAR

Two gallons of water being boiled, and allowed to cool; one pound of raisins, two pounds of loaf sugar, the juice of three lemons, and their peel cut thin, are added; after being stirred daily for four days, it is run through a jelly-bag and bottled; in ten days, or a fortnight more, it will be fit for use, and will be found excellent in warm weather. The corks should be tied down. (*The Practice of Cookery: Adapted to the Business of Every Day Life: Mrs. Dalgairns, 1830*)

BRAGGET

Bragget (all spelling variants derive from Old Celtic) is a sweet spiced fermented beverage made from ale and honey, similar to mead and metheglin. It was mentioned by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Take after the rate of a gallon of water to a pound of honey, and stir it till the honey be melted. Then, adding half a handful each of rosemary tops, bay leaves, sweetbriar, angelica, balm, thyme, or other sweet herbs, with half an ounce of sliced ginger, and a little nutmeg, mace, cinnamon, and a few cloves, boil them gently together for nearly half an hour; scumming it well, till it looks tolerably clear. In the mean time, having prepared three gallons of the first runnings of strong ale, or sweet wort, mix the two liquids quite hot, with all the herbs and spices; and, stirring them together for some time over a fire, but without suffering them to boil, strain off the liquor, and set it to cool. When it becomes only the warmth of new milk, ferment it with good ale yeast; and, after it has properly worked, tun it up, and hang a bag of bruised spices in the barrel, where it is to remain all the time of drawing. It is generally drunk from the cask; but may be bottled, like other liquors, any time after it has entirely ceased to hiss in the barrel. A weaker sort of bragget is sometimes prepared with the third runnings of the ale, a smaller proportion of honey, and the strained spices, &c. with a few fresh herbs; the second runnings, in that case, being made the family ale. These arrangements, however, and other obvious deviations, are made according to the taste or inclination of the respective parties.

(*A Modern System of Domestic Cookery* by M. Radcliffe, 1823)

In the novel, *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*, characters always seem to be eating comfits. Since comfits were obviously popular, a recipe seems in order.

This one is courtesy <https://giveitforth.wixsite.com>.

COMFITS

Comfits are still sold today (sometimes called “pastilles”). Basically, these are candies made by coating seeds (such as anise, fennel, caraway, coriander, cinnamon) or nuts (such as walnuts, almonds, filberts) with melted sugar. Sometimes orange rind, quince, or ginger were cut up and sugared. Comfits were often served at the end of a feast to freshen the breath, or act as a digestive, and sometimes used in the treatment of specific illness.

INGREDIENTS:

1 tablespoon seed of choice

1 cup sugar

1/3 cup water

METHOD:

1. Heat the sugar and the water until it reaches 170 degrees for a smooth coat, or 225 degrees for a jagged coat.

2. While the sugar syrup is heating, you will want to heat your seeds or nuts in a large flat pan such as a wok or frying pan in order to release their essential oils. If you cannot use your fingers to stir the seeds as they heat, the pan is too hot.

3. Once the syrup has reached the temperature you want, take a teaspoon of it and pour it over the seeds in the pan. Shake the pan until the syrup has cooled enough so that you can smooth the seeds around and separate them with your fingers. However, you can use the back of a wooden spoon to stir the seeds until the sugar dries.

If the seeds stick together or the sugar forms pellets in the bottom of the pan, you have used too much syrup.

NOTE: The first few charges (coats) of the syrup will make the seed look grayish, but then they will gradually begin to turn white.

4. After about 12 charges, you are done for the day. If you prefer comfits smaller, you don't need to repeat the process for

a second day. However, you can, if you wish, make another solution of syrup and coat your seeds again after they have had time to dry out overnight. The larger the comfits get, the more you will need to divide your batch. You need to be able to work within the pan.

Making comfits is not for hasty folk!

Beet juice, spinach juice and saffron can be used to color your comfits in the last several charges of syrup, or, you can add a few drops of food coloring if you wish.

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## COMMON MEDIEVAL DISHES

(Medieval Cuisine, by Shenanchie O'toole)

**Aleberry:** A brew made from ale boiled with spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, basil and sugar with toasted brown bread pieces called sops (similar to croutons).

**Aliper:** A strong garlic-pepper sauce used on meats, poultry, fish or cheese.

**Almond Milk:** Ground almonds boiled in milk and water, resulting in a common drink, or as stock for soups and sauces. Sometimes used in medicines.

**Amber Day Tart:** Onion and cheese pie (also known as Tart in Ymbre Day).

**Applemoye:** An apple confection made with beef broth, butter, sugar and saffron. Usually eaten with Almond Milk.

**Blanche Porre:** White leeks cooked with onions and vegetable broth. A small chicken (or other poultry) was often added, with saffron included to color the dish.

**Blomanger:** A rice dish cooked with almond milk, capon meat, oil, saffron and blanched almonds.

**Bryndons:** Small cakes in a sauce of nuts, wine and honey.

**Cabochoes in Potage:** Cabbage stewed with cinnamon and cloves.

**Caudel:** Warm beer, ale, or wine, mixed with spices and thickened with eggs.

**Chawettys:** Tarts filled with dates and spicy pork or veal.

**Cholent:** A savory stew made with herbed meat, vegetables and fruit.

**Circlette:** A round, almond and cardamom finger cake with currants, topped with a dollop of raspberry preserves.

**Clarrey:** Wine mulled with spices.

**Colle-flowre (Cauliflower):** Generally steamed in milk and seasoned with a butter-cream sauce, and garnished with nutmeg.

**Conyng:** A ginger sauce for rabbit.

**Crustade Lombarde:** A pie filled with fruited-custard.

**Dainties:** Described as “choice culinary treats,” dainties were deer testicles served with sweet-sour seasoning.

**Doucette:** Savory tarts baked in sweet dough and filled with meat, poultry, fish, jelly or fruit (or combinations of the same). Sold in medieval bakeries ready for the tavern.

**Eisel:** A sour wine (similar to vinegar), which was added to a dish to sharpen the taste.

**Entremet:** An edible sculpture of pastry, spun sugar, fruit, flowers and marzipan. Placed on a banquet table, or lofted about the eating hall to signal the entry of a special food course.

**Frittour:** A finger-food containing apples, pears and turnips. The frittour was dipped in a beer batter, fried until golden, and then sprinkled with brown sugar. Served at banquet boards or trestle tables.

**Frumenty:** A dish made with mashed wheat, almond milk, egg yolks and saffron.

**Funges:** Mushrooms in a leek broth, cooked with spices.

**“Gees” in Hotchpot:** Geese cooked in fat, wine and minced onion.

**Goos in Sawse Madame:** Goose cooked in a sauce of grapes and garlic.

**Gruel Bread:** “Un-yeasted” bread made from gruel, flour, salt and oil.

**Haroset:** A mix of apple, cinnamon, nuts and wine. Served at the Jewish Passover.

**Hippocras:** Wine strained through cloth, and then mixed with sweet basil, cinnamon, sage, cloves, ginger and rosemary. Warmed before serving.

**Hodge-Podge:** Also known as “hotch pot,” the dish was a succulent stew made from beef, veal, lentils, carrots, dates, apricots and currants. Prepared in a blanchet, which was a cauldron fitted to a tripod stand and held over the fire.

**Humble Pie:** Leftover pieces of a deer (heart, liver and brains), which were served to the less fortunate. The best part of the deer was reserved for upper-class lords and ladies. The servants would bake the “humbles” of the deer for themselves.

**Maislin:** Typical medieval bread made from mixed wheat and rye grains.



**Malmens Bastard:** A sweet wine of Spanish origin used for cooking as well as drinking. Made with ground almonds, honey, pine seeds, currant raisins, sandalwood, cinnamon, ginger, salt and saffron.

**Marchpane:** A paste made with ground almonds and sugar.

**Mince Pies:** Pies made with shredded or minced meat. During Christmas, the pies were baked in oblong casings to represent Jesus' crib. Three spices were added to the pie (cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg) for the three gifts given by the Magi.

**Mortrews:** A savory stew made from ground meats, vegetables and herbs.

**Mushroom Pasty:** Cheese and mushroom pie with ginger, olive oil, and pepper.

**Oysters in Gravy:** Oysters steamed in almond milk.

**Pan Perdu:** Circles of bread soaked in egg yolk, and then fried until golden brown. Sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar.

**Pandemayn:** Bread made from white wheat.

**Perry of Pesoun:** Peas cooked with onions, oil, sugar, and saffron.

**Pigge Farced:** Stuffed and roasted suckling pig.

**Pokerounce:** A sweet dish made with toasted bread squares, topped with honey, ginger, cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg and pine nuts.

**Posset:** Curdled milk mixed with wine, ale and spices.

**Pottage "fene boiles":** A bean pudding boiled in almond milk and wine.

**Pretzels:** Much like the modern version, double-baked bread shaped into arms crossed over the chest in prayer.

**Quince:** An orange-colored pear-shaped fruit often used in desserts, meat dishes, breads and medication.

**Salat:** A 14th-century salad of lettuce, herbs, scallions, leek, cress and spinach.

**Salmagundi:** An aromatic stew with a mix of vegetables, meats and spices.

**Satire:** A mixed dish of meat, vegetables and fruit.

**Scone:** A round bread cut into quarters; usually made from wheat, oats or barley.

**Sop:** Like a crouton, a small piece of toast or dried bread, sometimes spiced, placed on top of wine, ale or soup.

**Stewed Pigeons:** Pigeons stuffed with garlic and herbs, and then slowly cooked over a hot fire.

**Trencher:** Edible bread platter, often used instead of a plate at the table. The food was placed on the trencher, where gravies and sauces would be absorbed into the bread. (Leftovers were toasted and recycled for breakfast sops with wine, or given to the dogs or the poor).

**Wassail:** A hot drink made with ale, honey and spices. The name derives from the Old English words “was hael,” which meant “be well,” “good health” or “be hale.” Traditionally, wassail would be placed into a large bowl. The host would greet his guests by lifting up a glass and declaring, “Was hael!” The guests would automatically reply, “Drink hael!” (Which meant “drink and be well.”)

**Young Cabbage:** Cabbage head boiled slightly to remove the leaves, and then simmered with wine, oil and pepper.

## Unusual Words

### COCKENTRICE

“Cockentrice” is a dish consisting of a suckling pig’s upper body sewn onto the bottom half of a capon or turkey. The front end of the poultry is sewn to the rump of the piglet so as not to waste the other half of either. Other animal combinations were also used.

The word is a combination of “cock” (a capon) and “gryse” (a suckling pig). The main idea of the dish was to use parts of regular animals to create an impression of a mythical beast, which would surprise the guests both with its unusual appearance and impressive taste. Some medieval chefs went to the next level and used bear claws, ram’s horns, and makeshift wings to make the dish even more absurd.

### COFFYN

A “coffyn” is a pastry crust, often rectangular and free-standing, for small, individual pies. For example, chicken wrapped in bacon and fresh sage leaves then baked in the coffyn.

Ultimately, coffin containers made way for the sweet, flaky, and edible pie crusts we know today. As fat and sugar became more accessible, supple doughs (called short crusts) with sweeter fillings found a place at the table. Meanwhile, “cutting corners” by rolling out a round dough saved precious time for settlers in the New World, further transforming the medieval pastry box into the recognizable round pie.

### DRAGÉE

A “dragée” is a bite-sized confectionary made of a nut, seed, etc. with a hard sugar coating or a sugar-coated pill. First cousin to a comfit!

**DRESSER**

A “dresser,” also known as a “surveying board,” was a table, sideboard, or bench to which foods were brought for final preparation, decoration, or saucing before service. Situated in the kitchen, it was a cupboard or set of shelves for dishes and cooking utensils.

**ENDORE**

To “endore” food is to cover it with a yellow glaze of yolk of egg, saffron, or turmeric. The noun “endoring” is the glaze. The word comes from French and means “to make golden.”

**LARDERER**

A “larderer” is a person in charge of a larder. A larder is a cool area for storing food prior to use. Originally, it was where raw meat was larded—covered in fat—to be preserved. Many larders were made of stone, which would keep cold in the hottest weather. They had slate or marble shelves two or three inches thick. These shelves were wedged into thick stone walls. Fish or vegetables were laid directly onto the shelves and covered with muslin or handfuls of wet rushes were sprinkled under and around.

**MALMSEY**

“Malmsey” is a sweet, fortified Madeira wine with a strong flavor.

**NUNCHEON**

A “nuncheon,” which sounds like “munchie,” is exactly that, a light snack consisting typically of bread, cheese, and beer.

**PANTLER**

A pantler is the servant in charge of the bread and the pantry in a great house. A pantry is a room or cupboard where beverages, food, dishes, or provisions are stored.

### PERRY

“Perry” is pear cider, a fermented liquor made from pears.

The pears used to make perry tend to be small and relatively bitter. (The distinction between table pears and perry pears is similar to the difference between table apples and crab apples). Perry pears are thought to be descended from wild hybrids, known as wildings.

### SAUCIER

A “saucier,” is a cook responsible for preparing sauces and for sauteing foods on demand. A “saucery” was a place where sauces are made.

### SCULLION

A “scullion” is a servant who cleans pots and kettles, and does other menial services in the kitchen. The word comes from Middle English *sculyon* probably from Old French *escouvillon* meaning dishcloth, diminutive of *escouve* meaning broom.

### VERJUICE

“Verjuice” is a highly acidic juice made by pressing unripe grapes, crab-apples or other sour fruit. Sometimes lemon or sorrel juice, herbs or spices are added to change the flavor. The word verjus is derived from the French term *vert jus* (literally “green juice”) which refers to its sour grape source.

### WAFERER

“Waferer” is a name for a maker or seller of wafers or thin cakes. Think “cookies.”



## Le Morte d'Arthur

The most famous version of the King Arthur legends is Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, first published in 1485. In his work Malory combined the many previous versions of the Arthurian legends into a complex and sprawling narrative.

The fascinating medieval words collected here come from a version of *Le Morte d'Arthur* included in an e-book titled *King Arthur Collection*.

In a time when damsels in distress needed saving and mythical dragons needed slaying, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table were there to render justice in the face of any danger. From the incredible wizardry of Merlin to the undeniable passion of Sir Launcelot, the tales of Arthur and his knights offer epic adventures with the supernatural as well as timeless battles with our own humanity.

Banners and bloodshed abound, as do knights and ladies, Christians and sorcerers, sentiment and savagery. It remains a vivid medieval tapestry woven about a central figure who symbolizes the birth of an age of chivalry.

There's no doubt that Arthur lived and fought. In the Introduction to *Le Morte d'Arthur* (in a different paperback version), Robert Graves says:

“The original Arthur, as Sir John Rhys first suggested, and as Messrs. R. G. Collingwood and Geoffrey Ashe have since proved beyond reasonable doubt, was a heroic British cavalry general named Arturius. A hundred years after the Roman legions had evacuated Britain, he halted the pagan Saxon invaders with their Pictish and Anglian allies, fighting

ten main battles, and in 517 won a decisive victory at Mount Badon, which gave him possession of London.

He fell in 538, at the Battle of Camlan, near Glastonbury, which was both the seat of an ancient pagan cult and a Christian shrine. There his knights secretly buried him.”

There’s also no doubt that Sir Thomas Malory provided readers with a great gift when he sat in his prison cell and wrote down all the Arthur legends that he’d ever read or heard. The book may not be great literature, but it has (and probably will) serve as the basis for excellent tales by many modern writers.

Sir Thomas Malory was born in approximately 1410 and is believed to have been a knight serving under the Earl of Warwick. For a few years he was a member of Parliament but ultimately spent several long terms in prison for a variety of crimes, including robbery and assault. He completed *Le Morte d’Arthur*, the first great English prose epic, in Newgate Prison around 1469-70, shortly before his death. The book was eventually published in 1485 by William Caxton, the first English printer.

In the Afterword to *Le Morte d’Arthur* (the paperback version), Christopher Cannon notes, “Malory wrote in prison during one of the most tumultuous moments in English history. The so-called Wars of The Roses, which began when Richard II was deposed by Henry Bolingbroke, raged for nearly a century, during which time the English nobility fought pitched battles against one another repeatedly, often switching sides from one battle to the next. It was in the middle of this political chaos in 1469-70 that Malory found himself in the Tower of London and used the uninterrupted time to assemble the story of Arthur and his kingdom out of a variety of English and French sources. Although he shaped his version of this story to make it much more uplifting than those sources, it is, in his hands, about the hopes that may survive even the worst outcomes.”

“Malory may well have done nothing wrong, or perhaps actions he took in the service of his leaders had been carefully redescribed in the worst possible light by those who opposed him. Politically motivated accusations of crime were not uncommon. Of course Malory’s side-switching might have brought his problems on himself, but on the other hand, such behavior was also not uncommon nor even cowardly in this period, since power was so fluid (with much of the nobility switching sides with equal speed), and there was often no sure way to stay on any one side.”

~ ~ ~

Two lists of interesting words follow. The first list contains the grandparents of modern words, which are simply spelled differently, and archaic words no longer in use. The second list is of words which have a story.

## Archaic Words

**at all points** — completely, perfectly, thoroughly, everywhere

**brachet** — female hunting dog

**couch** — lower a spear to a horizontal position, as for attack

**damosel** — a young unmarried woman (old spelling of damsel)

**durst** — archaic version of dared, past tense of dare

**fain** — gladly, willing, desirous, obliged or required

**fiuance** — affiance, promise

**hight** — archaic version of named

**holden** — archaic version of held

**incoronation** — archaic version of coronation

**jousts-ward** — in the direction of the jousting place

**loth** — loath, meaning reluctant or unwilling

**nourished-brother** — foster brother

**overgovern** — govern with too much rigidity or precision

**palliasse** — a thin straw mattress

**privy** — archaic version of secret, hidden, private

**priviest** — most secret, most hidden

**privily** — confidentially, in secret

**stablished** — archaic form of established



**surance** — obsolete version of assurance

**to-fore** — before

**to-shivered** — broken to pieces

**to-brast** — burst

**unnethe** — hardly, scarcely, reluctantly, not easily

**wonderly** — wonderfully, greatly, very

**wroth** — angry

## Words With Stories

### ARRAY

As a noun, “array” mean a display of a particular type of thing. “There is a vast array of literature on the topic.”

As a verb, “array” means to:

—display or arrange (things) in a particular way

—dress someone in (the clothes specified)

Wiktionary says that array is also the name for a group of hedgehogs. Who knew?

### ASSAY

In medieval days, the verbs “assay” and “essay” meant the same thing: to attempt, to try, to test. In modern times, “essay” means to attempt, and “assay” means to test or evaluate.

The two words not only look and sound alike, they also come from the same root, the Middle French word *essai*, meaning “test” or “effort.”

Of course, essay is more common as a noun referring to a short literary composition, but that’s another essay.

### BESEEN

The word “beseen” means having a certain appearance, either good or bad. For example, “He and his men were passing well beseen.” Another would be, “She came poorly beseen.”

In other words, the men look well-provided for or well-arrayed, and the lady is badly dressed, furnished or equipped.

### COUSIN-GERMAN

“Cousin-german” means any of the following:

- a first cousin
- one related from a known common ancestor
- a kinsman or kinswoman; relative
- a term of address used by a sovereign for another sovereign or a high-ranking noble

The “german” part of the term is, so far as we can determine, an alternate spelling for “germane,” or “closely allied.”

### DOLE

The old meaning of “dole” is “grief or sorrow,” an alternate spelling of “dolor.” Another is one’s allotted share, fate, or destiny.

However, the word has also been used, since the 13th century, to refer to a charitable gift given to the poor. This derives from the ‘doling out’ (apportioning) of charitable gifts of food or money. Since about 1920 it has been a popular name in Britain for various government payments made regularly to the unemployed. Hence, people speak of being “on the dole.”

Yet another meaning is “the moaning of doves.” Doves may sound like they’re moaning, but it’s doubtful whether they have any concept of dolor.

### EVENSONG

In the Christian Church, “evensong” is a church service traditionally held near sunset and focused on singing psalms and other biblical canticles. Old English speakers translated the Latin word *vesperas* (vespers) as *æfensang*, which became ‘evensong’ in modern English. Evensong is also an archaic or poetic word for “evening.”

### GRAMERCY

“Gramercy” means ‘many thanks’. It is derived from the French term *grand merci*, meaning ‘big thanks.’

### JESSERAUNT

“Jesseraunt” (also spelled “jazerant”) is a medieval coat or jacket of small overlapping metal plates (thus called scale armor) usually mounted on linen or other lining.

The samurai of Japan used a type of jazerant during the Edo period; kusari katabira (mail jackets) were constructed with mail sewn between layers of cloth.

### JOUST

The medieval “joust” originated in the military tactics of heavy cavalry during the High Middle Ages. By the 14th century, many members of the nobility, including kings, had taken up jousting to showcase their own courage, skill, and talents in this dangerous sport. Spectators watched from purpose-built stands, pavilions with balconies, or simply tents. There were stalls with refreshments, sellers of horses and fine clothes, intermission performances of drama with musicians and acrobats, pageants, and several banquets over the course of the event.

From the 11th to 14th centuries, when medieval jousting was still practiced in connection with the use of the lance in warfare, armor evolved from mail (with a solid, heavy helmet and shield) to plate armor. By 1400, knights wore full suits of plate armor.

In this early period, a joust was still a duel in general and not limited to the lance. Combatants would begin riding on one another with the lance, but might continue with shorter range weapons after the distance was closed or after one or both parties were unhorsed. Tournaments in the early Medieval period were much rougher and less “gentlemanly” affairs than in the late medieval era of chivalry.

With the development of the courtly ideals of chivalry, the joust became more regulated. This “chivalric revival” was based on the chivalric romances of the high medieval period and competitors with a criminal background were banned from competing. The victor of a joust won prizes such as a gold crown or a gold chain, a ring, a jewel, a fine sword or helmet, even a horse or a falcon, while less commercial recompense took the form of a certain lady’s kiss or garter and the general adoration of the crowd and one’s peers.

Chivalry was based on a religious, moral, and social code which helped distinguish the higher classes from those below them and which provided a means by which knights could earn a favorable reputation. Essential chivalric qualities to be displayed included courage, military prowess, honor, loyalty, justice, good manners, and generosity. As part of the code of chivalry, knights were expected not only to be familiar with poetry but also capable of composing and performing it.

The development of the term knight (*chevalier*) dates to this period. Before the 12th century, *cnicht* was a term for a servant. In the 12th century, it became used of a military follower in particular. It was only after 1300 that knighthood came to be recognized as a junior rank of nobility. By the 15th century, “knightly” virtues were sought by the noble classes even of ranks much senior to knight.

*The Chronicles of Froissart*, written during the 1390s, contain many details concerning jousting in this era. The combat was divided into rounds of three encounters with various weapons. During this time, the joust detached itself from the reality of the battlefield and became a chivalric sport. Knights would seek opportunities to duel with opponents from the hostile camp for honor off the battlefield.

The lists, or list field, was the arena where a jousting event was held. More precisely, it was the roped-off enclosure where tournament fighting took place. In the late medieval period, castles and palaces were augmented by purpose-built tiltyards as a venue for “jousting tournaments.”

The medieval joust took place on an open field. Indeed, the term joust meant “a meeting” and referred to arranged combat in general. At some point in the 14th century, a cloth barrier was introduced as an option to separate the contestants. It became a wooden barrier or fence in the 15th century, now known as “tilt barrier,” and “tilt” came to be used as a term for the joust itself. The purpose of the tilt barrier was to prevent collisions and to keep the combatants at an optimal angle for breaking the lance. This greatly facilitated the control of the horse and allowed the rider to concentrate on aiming the lance.

Jousting lances were modified from their original war form for sports and entertainment. For warfare, lances are made of metal, but jousting lances are made of wood and only tipped with metal, which allows them to break on impact with the opponent’s shield.

Specialized jousting armor was produced in the late 15th to the 16th century. It was heavier than suits of plate armor intended for combat, and could weigh as much as 110 lbs. compared to some 55 lbs. for field armor. As it did not need to permit free movement of the wearer, the only limiting factor was the maximum weight that could be carried by a warhorse of the period.

The two most common kinds of horses used for jousting were chargers and larger destriers. Chargers were medium-weight horses bred and trained for agility and stamina. Destriers were heavier, similar to today’s Andalusian horse, but not as large as the modern draft horse.

During a jousting tournament, the horses wore caparisons, a type of ornamental cloth featuring the owner’s heraldic signs. Competing horses had their heads protected by a chanfron, an iron shield for protection from otherwise lethal lance hits. Other forms of equipment on the horse included a saddle with a high back to provide leverage during the charge or when hit, as well as stirrups for the necessary leverage to deliver blows with the lance.

### MAUGRE

“Maugre” means in spite of, notwithstanding, despite.

The word is now quite rare, but it served the English language for more than 700 years. Emerson, in his *Essays, First Series*, says, “By virtue of this inevitable nature, private will is overpowered, and, maugre our efforts or our imperfections, your genius will speak from you, and mine from me.”

The word is Anglo-French in origin, coming from *mal* or *mau*, meaning evil, and *gré*, meaning grace or favor.

### MICKLE

The word “much” derives from the Old English “mickle” and has now almost entirely replaced it. A “mickle,” or as they say it in Scotland, a “muckle,” means “great or large in size.”

The proverb “many a little makes a mickle” has now also been largely superseded by the 18th century “look after the pennies, and the pounds will look after themselves.”

The phrase’s variant form “many a mickle makes a muckle” is also sometimes heard. This modern version is nonsensical since what it’s saying is, “many a much makes a much.”

### NECROMANCY

Specifically, “necromancy” is the practice of magically communicating with the dead, summoning their spirits in order to predict the future. In more general terms, it’s a system of sorcery or black magic.

“Morgan le Fay was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of necromancy.”

Early necromancy was related to—and most likely evolved from—forms of shamanism or prehistoric ritual magic that calls upon spirits such as the ghosts of deceased forebears. Classical necromancers addressed the dead in “a mixture of

high-pitch squeaking and low droning,” comparable to the trance-state mutterings of shamans.

Necromancy was prevalent throughout antiquity with records of its practice in many ancient countries. In his *Geographica*, Strabo refers to “diviners by the dead” among the people of Persia, and necromancy is believed to have also been widespread among the peoples of Chaldea and Babylonia. Traditional Chinese folk religion involves necromancy in seeking blessing from dead ancestors through ritual displays of filial piety.

The oldest literary account of necromancy is found in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Under the direction of Circe, a powerful sorceress, Odysseus travels to the underworld in order to gain insight about his impending voyage home by raising the spirits of the dead through the use of spells which Circe has taught him. The *Odyssey*’s passages contain many descriptive references to necromantic rituals: rites must be performed around a pit with fire during nocturnal hours, and Odysseus has to follow a specific recipe, which includes the blood of sacrificial animals, to concoct a libation for the ghosts to drink while he recites prayers to both the ghosts and gods of the underworld.

The rituals of necromancy could be quite elaborate, involving magic circles, wands, talismans, incantations and so on. The necromancer might also surround himself with morbid aspects of death, which often included wearing the deceased’s clothing and consuming foods that symbolized lifelessness and decay such as unleavened black bread and unfermented grape juice. These ceremonies could carry on for hours, days, or even weeks, leading up to the eventual summoning of spirits.

While some cultures considered the knowledge of the dead to be unlimited, ancient Greeks and Romans believed that individual shades knew only certain things. The apparent value of their counsel may have been based on things they knew in life or knowledge they acquired after death. Ovid writes in his *Metamorphoses* of a marketplace in the under-

world where the dead convene to exchange news and gossip.

One noted commonality among practitioners of necromancy was usually the utilization of certain toxic and hallucinogenic plants from the nightshade family such as black henbane, jimson weed, belladonna or mandrake, usually in magic salves or potions.

### ORGULOUS

The word “orgulous” means proud or haughty or disdainful.

William Shakespeare begins the Trojan War tale *Troilus and Cressida* by employing “orgulous,” a colorful word first adopted in the 13th century from Anglo-French *orguillus*. After the Bard’s day, orgulous dropped from sight for 200 years; there is no record of its use until it was rejuvenated by the pens of Robert Southey and Sir Walter Scott in the early 1800s. It remains an elegant (if infrequent) choice for today’s writers.

### PAP

“Pap” has several meanings:

- a soft food (as for infants)
- money and favors obtained as political patronage
- something lacking solid value or substance
- over-simplified idea (late 14th century)
- nipple of a woman’s breast (dialectal)

### PORPHYRY

“Porphyry” is any of various granites or igneous rocks with coarse-grained crystals embedded in a compact dark red or purple matrix. In its non-geologic, traditional use, the term porphyry usually refers to the purple-red form of this stone, valued for its appearance, but other colors of decorative porphyry are also used such as green, black, and gray.

The term porphyry is from the Ancient Greek *porphyra*,



meaning “purple.” Purple was the color of royalty, and the Roman “imperial porphyry” was a deep purple igneous rock. Some authors claimed that the rock was the hardest known in antiquity. Thus porphyry was prized for monuments and building projects in Imperial Rome and thereafter.

### POSTERN

A postern is a secondary door or gate in a fortification such as a city wall or castle curtain wall. Posterns were often located in a concealed location which allowed the occupants to come and go inconspicuously. In the event of a siege, a postern could act as a sally port, allowing defenders to make a sortie on the besiegers. Placed in a less exposed, less visible location, they were usually relatively small, and therefore easily defensible.

In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, “La Cote de Male Tayle” is rescued at the Castle Orgulous when a damsel slips through the postern to find his horse and ties it to the postern so that La Cote de Male Tayle can escape the 100 knights assailing him.

In other words, an escape hatch.

### PUISSANCE

“Puisseance” is an archaic word for great power, influence, or prowess. The modern word means a competitive test of a horse’s ability to jump large obstacles in show jumping.

### PURFLE

To “purfle” means to decorate or trim something with an ornamental border, for example, “a clear plastic raincoat purfled with ribbon.” In the past, “purfle” got the most use in connection with adorning garments. Today, today it usually means setting a decorative inlaid border around the body of a guitar or violin, a process known as “purfling.”

### RECREANT

A “recreant” is a person who is unfaithful or disloyal, a deserter or a traitor, one who yields in combat and begs for mercy, a cowardly wretch.

### SALLY PORT

A “sally port” is a secure, controlled door or gate in a fortification for the quick passage of troops when making a sally. It’s also used nowadays to mean a secure entryway (as at a prison) that consists of a series of doors or gates. The entrance may be protected by a wall on the outside or it may include two sets of doors that can be barred independently.

The word “port” is ultimately from Latin *porta* for door. Often the term postern is used synonymously. It can also mean a tunnel or passage as a secret exit for those besieged.

A “sally,” from the Latin “salire” meaning “to jump,” was originally a sudden rush out of a besieged position, a lightning attack designed to surprise the enemy. A sally port is therefore essentially a door in a castle or city wall that allows troops to make sallies without compromising the defensive strength of fortifications.

### SITH

The word “sith” is an archaic variant of “since, afterwards, subsequently.” The phrase “by siths” used to mean “at times, sometimes.”

So far as we know, “sith” has nothing to do with the Sith Lords from Star Wars.

### SKIM

“So by Merlin’s advice there were sent fore-riders to skim the country...”

“Skim” is a modern word, but it was used in medieval days,

too, as illustrated by the sentence above, but in a way that's a bit different.

"Skim" has the following meanings:

- clear a liquid of scum or floating matter
- pass or glide lightly over a surface
- throw an object in a smooth, gliding path
- read superficially; to glance through something, as a book
- cover with a thin film, as a finishing coat of plaster
- take the best parts or items from
- conceal part of income or profits; practice skimming.
- embezzle, as from employee pension plans

Malory's sentence uses "skim" in the sense of glancing through something such as a book. But his fore-riders are skimming a country, not a book. They're not flipping pages, they're flipping villages or counties, looking for information or rumors about the possible massing of enemy soldiers.

### SMOTE

"Smote" is the past tense of "smite," which means:

- to strike or hit hard, with the hand, a stick, or other weapon
- to strike down, injure, or slay
- to afflict with deadly effect: smitten by polio
- to affect with strong, sudden feeling: smitten with terror
- to impress favorably: smitten by her charms

"The silver knight approached the black knight and smote him with his sword."

### SWEVEN

A "sweven" is an archaic word meaning a dream experienced in sleep, a dream-vision, or prophetic dream. It can also mean a supernatural vision appearing to one in a waking state. For example, "King Arthur and his knights met a wonder dream (sweven) two nights before the battle."

### VICTUALED

To be “victualed” means to be well-supplied with food. “The vessel was victualed before the long voyage.”

The word derives from the Latin plural noun *victualia* (provisions), and ultimately (by way of *victus*, meaning “nourishment” or “way of living”) from the Latin verb *vivere*, meaning “to live.” *Vivere* is the source of a smorgasbord of other English words, such as vital, vivid, and survive. It’s also the root of viand and vittles, two English words referring to food.

To “revictual” means to “furnish again with provisions.”

### WEEN

To “ween” is to hold as an opinion, to suppose or believe. For example, “he weened that all the kings and knights had come for great love.”

It can also mean to expect, hope, or intend. “Many weened to have been king.”

### WIST, WIT, WOT

These three words, “wist, wit, and wot,” are all archaic forms of the verb “to know.” They arose from Old English *witan* (past tense *wast*, past participle *witen*) meaning “to know, be aware of or conscious of, understand, observe, ascertain, learn,” from Proto-Germanic *witanan* “to have seen,” hence “to know.”

You wist not what these words mean, but we wot that they will soon make sense to you. Just give us a minute here.

The verb “to wit” is interchangeable with “to know,” and is conjugated with a present “wot,” and a past “wist.” This inflection is derived from more complicated forms in older English, and now has become obsolete.

“Wist not” (wist seems always to be used with not) means “did not know.”

The phrase “to wit” also means to know or acknowledge that something is, to discover what something will be, but also can mean according as it were, that is, how, and since.

“Wot” means “to know” and “wot not” is similar to “wist not” in that it means to not know, to not see (figuratively), to not be sure of something.

More recently, wot was used as a humorous misspelling of “what,” intended to mimic certain working class accents. Charles Dickens used it that way in *A Tale of Two Cities*. It was popular during World War II as part of slogans to do with wartime rationing. “Wot, no bananas?”



## A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is an 1889 novel by American humorist and writer Mark Twain. The novel features a time traveler from the contemporary US, using his knowledge of science (Twain was fascinated with science and scientific inquiry) to introduce modern technology to Arthurian England. Such historical manipulation has become a trope of speculative fiction called 'alternate history.' The time traveler, Hank, is disgusted by how the barons treat the commoners, and tries to implement democratic reforms, but is unable to prevent the death of Arthur. It is a satire of feudalism and monarchy that also celebrates homespun ingenuity and democratic values.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835 – 1910), known as Mark Twain, was an American writer, humorist and essayist. He was praised as the “greatest humorist the United States has produced,” with William Faulkner calling him “the father of American literature.” His novels include *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and its sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with the latter often called the “Great American Novel.”

As his fame grew, he became a much sought-after speaker. His wit and satire, both in prose and in speech, earned praise from critics and peers, and Twain was a friend to presidents, artists, industrialists, and European royalty.

Below are some of the interesting words found in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

### BLATHERSKITE

A blatherskite is a person who talks at great length without making much sense or someone worthless, a deadbeat. The word is of Scottish origin, with “blather” or “blether” meaning claptrap and “skite” adapted from “skate,” meaning someone who is contemptible (like “cheapskite”). The first use of the term dates to the mid-17th century.

Blather can also be spelled “blither.” If someone calls you “a blithering idiot,” they’re probably British.

### CHROMO

“Chromo” (from the Greek *chrōma*) is a combining form which means color or pigment, and is an abbreviation of “chromolithograph.”

### CICERONE

“Cicerone” is an old term for a guide who conducts visitors to museums and galleries, etc., and explains matters of historic, archaeological, antiquarian, or artistic interest. It can also mean a mentor or tutor.

Cicerone comes from the name of the Roman statesman Cicero, known for his skills as an orator and rhetorician. Cicero’s reputation for eloquence and learning led to the use of the Italian version of his name, Cicerone, to refer to sightseeing guides. The name Cicero itself derives from *cicer*, the Latin word for chickpea. (Plutarch wrote that an ancestor of Cicero’s had a wart or facial deformity that resembled a chickpea and resulted in the odd family name, but this could be the ancient Roman version of a modern urban myth.)

In his travel book, William Lithgow (1632) pointed out the usefulness of the tourist guides (cicerones).

Nowadays, cicerone means someone who is a certified expert in the production, evaluation, and service of craft beer.

### COLPORTEUR

A “colporteur” is a peddler of books, newspapers, and similar literature.

In 19th-century America, the word *colporteur* (borrowed from the French and meaning “peddler”) came to be used especially of door-to-door peddlers of religious books and tracts, and it has carried that specific sense into the present.

The word traces to the Latin prefix *com-* (together) plus the verb *portare* (to carry), two elements that were combined to create *comportare* (to bring together). Middle French speakers used the word as *comporter* (to carry or to peddle), giving rise to “comporteur.” Over time, perhaps influenced by the phrase *porter à col* (to carry on one’s back or neck), the term’s spelling shifted to the form now used. But not used very much, since we’ve never seen it except in Mark Twain’s book.

### DULCIMER

A “dulcimer” can be a flat musical instrument that has strings stretched across it and is played with two light hammers. It may also refer to an instrument used in American folk music that has three or four strings, is held on the lap, and is played with the fingers, a pick, or a small stick.

The word arose from Middle English *dowcemere*, from Middle French *doulcemer*, from Old Italian *dolcimelo*, from *dolce* (sweet).

So, the dulcimer makes (depending on the player) a “sweet sound.”

### GIMCRACK

“Gimcrack” is used to describe items that are ornamental but of little value and often poorly made. Gimcracks are cheap and showy knickknacks, baubles, trinkets, gewgaws, kickshaws, or tchotchkes.



Yet the word was used as a name for a famous racehorse in the 1700s. A 1765 painting by George Stubbs, titled *Gimcrack on New Market Heath*, featuring the horse, was sold in 2011 for \$35.79 million. There's no doubt the horse was successful; he won 27 of his 36 races in a career that spanned 7 seasons.

Gimcrack certainly doesn't sound like a gimcrack!

### HALBERD

A halberd is a two-handed weapon that consists of an ax blade with a hook on the back side and a sharp spike mounted on the end of a staff, usually about 5–6 feet long. Invented by Swiss soldiers in the 1300s, it became an important weapon in Europe in the 1400s and early 1500s. The halberd enabled a foot soldier to contend with an armored man riding on horseback; the spiked head kept the rider at a distance, the ax blade could strike a heavy cleaving blow, even piercing armor, and the hook could pull a rider off his horse.

The weapon was popular because it was cheap to produce and very effective. A man who was an expert (a halberdier) in using the halberd was a particularly deadly foe.

One disadvantage was that the halberdier could not use a shield at the same time, which became a problem if the combat turned to close quarters. In such cases, halberds were useless and the halberdier had to resort to a dagger or sword.

The development of firearms made the halberd obsolete.

### HAUBERK

A “hauberk” is a piece of armor originally covering only the neck and shoulders but later consisting of a full-length coat of mail.

It was typically constructed from interlocking loops of metal to form a mail shirt. The sleeves sometimes only reached the elbow, but often were full arm length, with some covering the

hands with a supple glove leather face on the palm of the hand, or even full mail gloves. It was usually thigh or knee length, with a split in the front and back to the groin so the wearer could ride a horse. It sometimes incorporated a hood, or coif. According to one historian, “the hauberk was probably worn over, but not attached to, a heavy, quilted undergarment, the *haubergeon*.”

While lighter than plate armor, a hauberk could be quite heavy. In Europe, use of mail hauberks continued up through the 1300s, when plate armor began to supplant it.

The Bayeux Tapestry illustrates Norman soldiers wearing a knee-length version of the hauberk. Such armor was quite expensive, both in materials (iron wire), including the time and skill required to manufacture it, so common foot soldiers rarely were so equipped.

### DROIT DU SEIGNEUR

“*Droit du seigneur*,” a French phrase meaning “right of the lord,” was a supposed legal or customary right, in medieval Europe, of a feudal lord to have sexual relations with a vassal’s bride on her wedding night. The term is often used synonymously with *jus primae noctis*, Latin for “right of the first night.”

Many ancient references to the custom exist. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh is described as having practiced the custom. The Greek historian Herodotus mentions a similar custom among the Adyrmachidae in ancient Libya.

The medieval marriage fine or “merchet” has sometimes been interpreted as a payment for the *droit du seigneur* to be waived. Alternatively, it has been interpreted as compensation to the lord for the young women leaving his lands. In the 14th-century French epic poem *Baudouin de Sebourc*, a tyrannical lord claims the *jus primae noctis* unless he receives part of the bride’s dowry.

According to the Scottish legal scholar David Maxwell Walker, instances have been recorded of the *jus primæ noctis* being claimed up to the 1700s. After their travels in Scotland in 1773, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell documented the custom of the payment of merchet, linking it with the “right of first night.” Sir Walter Scott mentioned the custom in his historical Scottish novel, *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828).

Some scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries disputed the historical basis of the “right of first night.” Over time, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Larousse* encyclopedias dramatically changed their opinion on the topic, moving from acceptance to rejection of the historical veracity of the idea.

We're inclined to go with Herodotus and the many ancient references. To me, the questioning of scholars of the 1800s and 1900s smacks of some sort of politics. Or a desire, perhaps, to portray the human animal as nicer than it is.

### LEMAN

“Leman” means lover or sweetheart, especially a mistress.

### MORION

A “morion” is a helmet having a flat or turned-down brim and a crest from front to back. It originated in the Kingdom of Castile (Spain) and was used in the 1500s and 1600s. Its introduction was contemporaneous with the exploration of the Americas. Explorers Hernando de Soto and Coronado may have supplied them to foot soldiers in the 1540s.

The morion appears often in popular culture. For example, in the Disney movie *Pocahontas*, English soldiers like Captain John Smith wear morions.

### PALIMPSEST

A “palimpsest” is a manuscript, typically of papyrus or parchment, that has been written on more than once, with the

earlier writing incompletely scraped off or erased and often legible. The term can also be applied to an object or area that has extensive evidence of previous use.

The Ancient Greeks wrote on wax-coated tablets with a stylus. They could erase the writing by smoothing the wax surface and then use the tablet again. This practice was adopted by Ancient Romans. Cicero's use of the term palimpsest confirms such a practice.

Parchment was made of lamb, calf, or kid skin. It was expensive and not readily available, so, in the interest of economy, a page was often re-used by scraping off the previous writing. Because parchment prepared from animal hides is much more durable than paper or papyrus, most palimpsests known to modern scholars are parchment, which rose in popularity in Western Europe after the 6th century. Where papyrus was in common use, reuse of writing media was less common because papyrus was cheaper. Some papyrus palimpsests do survive.

The writing was washed from parchment or vellum using milk and oat bran. With the passing of time, the faint remains of the former writing would reappear enough so that scholars could discern the text (called the *scriptio inferior*, the "underwriting") and decipher it. In the later Middle Ages the surface of the vellum was usually scraped away with powdered pumice, irretrievably losing the writing; hence the most valuable palimpsests are those that were overwritten in the early Middle Ages.

This practice reminds us of the old after-school duty of erasing the blackboards each day and having fits of sneezing because of the chalk dust. It wasn't a chore that anyone wanted and kids today are likely happier with the Delete key.

### PINCHBECK

The word "pinchbeck" has two uses. As a noun, it means an alloy of copper and zinc resembling gold, used in watchmaking

and costume jewelry. As an adjective, it describes items appearing valuable, but actually cheap, tawdry, or counterfeit.

In the early 1700s, Christopher Pinchbeck, a London watchmaker, invented an alloy that would be posthumously named for him. Although the metal is used as a substitute for gold, pinchbeck didn't acquire its "counterfeit" sense until the 1790s, over 50 years after Pinchbeck's death.

Pinchbeck created the alloy as a way to make ornaments that looked like gold but were less expensive. He did not attempt to deceive; he clearly labelled the metal for what it was. To start with, it was a respected alternative to gold; jewelers in the 1700s used it legitimately to make nice-looking jewelry.

However, so many jewelers used it for inferior goods, passing off pinchbeck as real gold, that the word began to mean something that was of poor quality or a cheap imitation. Anthony Trollope, in *Framley Parsonage*, writes, "Where, in these pinchbeck days, can we hope to find the old agricultural virtue in all its purity?"

### RAPSCALLION

A "rapsallion" is a mischievous person, a rascal, a scamp. The original word for such people was "rascal." By the 1500s, English speakers had expanded rascal to rascallion. But eventually, rascallion was further altered, resulting in the snappier rapsallion, which is still commonly used as a synonym for varlet, scoundrel, and rogue.

### SENESCHAL

A "seneschal," in medieval and early modern France, was a steward or administrator in a noble household, in charge of domestic arrangements and the administration of servants. In the medieval period particularly, this meant the seneschal might oversee hundreds of laborers, servants and their associated responsibilities. He thus had a great deal of power in the community, at a time when much of the local economy

was often based on the wealth and responsibilities of such a household.

As time went on, the office declined in importance and was often equivalent to that of a bailiff. The office and title persisted until the French Revolution. In the UK, the modern meaning of seneschal is primarily ecclesiastical, referring to a cathedral official.

### **SHINDY**

A “shindy” (or “shindig”) is a social gathering with dancing or a large or lavish party. “Shindy” is itself the alteration of another word, shinny, used for a variation of hockey that is played with a curved stick and a ball or block of wood. It’s not entirely clear how the game of shinny gave shindy its meaning of “social gathering with dancing,” but shinny remains the most likely origin.

May we suggest that a game of shinny could resemble, in some ways, a lot of people dancing together and possibly kicking each other in the shins?

### **SIMON-PURE**

“Simon-pure” means genuinely and thoroughly pure, if such a thing is possible. But it can also be used to mean superficially or hypocritically virtuous.

The word comes from a character called Simon Pure, who is impersonated by another in the play *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) by Susannah Centlivre. The real Simon Pure is treated as an impostor and is accepted as who he is only after he has proven his identity.

### **STUFF**

“Stuff” is an old word and, today, certainly a popular one. One dictionary defines the noun as “matter, material, articles, or activities of a specified or indeterminate kind that are being

referred to, indicated, or implied.” This means that everything is “stuff.” The verb also has several meanings. They are listed below.

The phrase found in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* is “a stuff gown.” In Victorian dressmaking terms, the word “stuff” was used as a generic term for woven fabrics. Therefore, the lady referred to was wearing a gown made of a woven fabric.

The gowns of most English lawyers are still described as “stuff gowns.” This is in contrast with those of King’s Counsel, which are made of silk, thus termed “silks.” Therefore, “stuff” in this context simply refers to fabric not made of silk or silk substitutes.

“Stuff” as a noun:

- the basic constituents or characteristics of something
- material to be worked upon or used in making something
- material, objects, or items of some unspecified kind
- property, as personal belongings or equipment
- something to be swallowed, as food, drink, or medicine
- inward qualities, or capabilities: To have the right stuff.
- action or talk of a particular kind: Kid stuff.
- a specialty or special skill: To do one’s stuff.
- worthless things or matter
- worthless or foolish talk or writing: Stuff and nonsense.
- woven material or fabric, especially wool (chiefly British)
- a baseball pitcher’s repertoire of pitches and effectiveness
- spin or speed imparted to a baseball or tennis ball
- literary, musical, or other compositions or performances
- one’s trade, skill, subject, etc.: She knows her stuff.
- a drug, especially an illicit one

“Stuff” as a verb:

- fill (a receptacle or space) tightly with something
- cram (something) into a receptacle, cavity, or the like
- line with some kind of material as a padding or packing
- cram with food
- fill (poultry, vegetables, etc.) with a stuffing

- fill the preserved skin of (a dead animal) with material
- put fraudulent votes into (a ballot box)
- pack tightly in a confined place; crowd together
- crowd (a vehicle, room, etc.) with persons
- fill (the mind) with facts, details, etc.
- stop up or plug; Block or choke (usually followed by up)
- to cram oneself with food

“Stuff” as slang:

- express indifference or rejection: “Stuff the diet!”
- express contempt: “Stuff it!” and “Get stuffed!”

### SUMACH-TOBACCO

“Sumach-tobacco” is used by some North American Indian peoples as a substitute for tobacco or for mixing with it, typically consisting of dried sumac leaves and the inner bark of willow or dogwood. It is sometimes called “kinnikinnick.”

Sumac or sumach is any of about 35 species of flowering plants. Sumacs grow in temperate and subtropical regions throughout every continent except Antarctica and South America. Sumac is used as a spice, as a dye, and in medicine.

And, apparently, as an ingredient of tobacco.

### SURROUND

As a verb, “surround” means to be all around someone or something, to envelop.

As a noun, a “surround” is a thing that forms a border or edging around an object, such as a wall encircling a castle, or a fence around a field. For example, “It was an informative guide to the city and surrounds.”

### TABARD

A tabard is a type of short coat commonly worn by men in Europe during the late Middle Ages. Generally worn outdoors,



the coat was either sleeveless or had short sleeves. It might be open at the sides, and could be worn with or without a belt. Though most were ordinary garments, often work clothes, tabards might be emblazoned on the front and back with a coat of arms, and in this form, they survive as the distinctive garment of officers of arms.

In modern British usage, the term has been revived for what is known in American English as a cobbler apron: a lightweight open-sided upper overgarment, of similar design to its medieval and heraldic counterpart, worn in particular by workers in the catering, cleaning and healthcare industries as protective clothing, or outdoors by those requiring high-visibility clothing. Tabards may also be worn by percussionists in marching bands in order to protect their uniforms from the straps and rigging used to support the instruments.

### **TOW LINEN**

“Tow linen” is a coarse heavy linen used in the 18th century for clothing.

In the textile industry, a tow is a coarse, broken fiber, removed during the processing of flax, hemp, or jute. Flax tows are often used as upholstery stuffing and oakum.

The very light color of flax tow is the source of the word “towhead,” meaning a person with naturally light blond hair.

### **VILLEIN**

In medieval Europe, a “villein” was a class of serf tied to the land under the feudal system. Under contract to the lord of the manor, they were required to spend some of their time working on the lord’s fields in return for land to use for themselves. There were a number of legal restrictions that differentiated villeins from freemen, and a villein could not leave without his lord’s permission. Generally, villeins held their status not by birth but by the land they held, and it was also possible for them to gain manumission from their lords.

Villeins occupied the social space between a free peasant (freeman) and a slave. The majority of medieval European peasants were villeins.

“Villein” is derived from Late Latin *villanus*, meaning a man employed at a Roman *villa rustica*, or large agricultural estate. The system of tied serfdom originates from a decree issued by the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284–305 CE) in an attempt to prevent the flight of peasants from the land and the consequent decline in food production. The decree obliged peasants to register in their locality and never leave it.

The villeinage system largely died out in England in 1500.

### WHITSUNDAY

“Whitsunday” (also Whitsun or Whit Sunday) is the name used among Anglicans and Methodists for the Christian holy day of Pentecost. It falls on the seventh Sunday after Easter and commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ’s disciples.

In England the day took on some characteristics of Beltane, the pagan celebration of the beginning of the summer half-year. Whitsuntide, the week following Whitsunday, was one of three holiday weeks for the medieval villein; on most manors he was free from service on the lord’s land this week, which marked a pause in the agricultural year.

The name is a contraction of “White Sunday.” According to one interpretation, the name derives from the white garments worn by those expecting to be baptized on that Sunday. In England white clothes, rather than the more usual red, were traditional for the day.

Whit Sunday has featured many forms of celebration, and was of significant cultural importance. It was a custom for children to receive a brand new set of clothes, even among the poorest families, a tradition which continued into the 20th century.

The celebrations took the form of fêtes, fairs, pageants and parades, with Whitsun ales and Morris dancing in the south of England and Whit walks, Club Days and wakes in the north. A poster advertising the Whitsun festivities at Sunbury, Middlesex in 1778 listed the following attractions:

On Whit Monday, in the morning, will be a punting match ... The first boat that comes in to receive a guinea...In the afternoon a gold-laced hat, worth 30s. to be cudgell'd for ... On Whit Tuesday, in the morning, a fine Holland smock and ribbons, to be run for by girls and young women. And in the afternoon six pairs of buckskin gloves to be wrestled for.

A report in John Harlan and T.T. Wilkinson's *Lancashire Folk Lore* (1882) reads:

“It is customary for the cotton mills etc., to close for Whitsuntide week to give the hands a holiday; the men going to the races etc. and the women visiting Manchester on Whit-Saturday, thronging the markets, the Royal Exchange and the Infirmary Esplanade, and other public places: And gazing in at the shop windows, whence this day is usually called ‘Gaping Sunday’.”



## The Mabinogion

One of Wales's greatest contributions to European literature, *The Mabinogion* is a rich mixture of Celtic mythology and Arthurian romance captured by anonymous authors in eleven Welsh tales found in medieval manuscripts. Some details may hark back to older Iron Age traditions, being passed down through the generations by word of mouth by early Welsh bards. These early Celtic storytellers wandered Britain and beyond, swapping their many tales for board and lodging. The stories they told tended to be memorized only in outline, the details being filled in and embellished each time as the story unfolded.

The authors tell of Gwydion the shape-shifter, who can create a woman out of flowers; of Math the magician whose feet must lie in the lap of a virgin; of hanging a pregnant mouse and hunting a magical boar. Dragons, witches, and giants live alongside kings and heroes, and quests of honor, revenge, and love are set against the backdrop of a country struggling to retain its independence.

### FROM THE INTRODUCTION BY SIONED DAVIES

The collection of medieval Welsh prose tales known as *The Mabinogion* tells of heroes on magical quests, knights-in-arms whose adventures take them to the far ends of the earth in pursuit of true love, and young men who are stopped in their tracks and forced to confront their destiny. The tales also tell of powerful women who betray, who are wronged, and who die. Dated sometime between the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, *The Mabinogion* displays the performance techniques of the traditional storyteller.

They present an intriguing combination of themes and characters as two traditions collaborate—the oral and the literary. *The Mabinogion* is rightly regarded as a classic, translated now into many languages, adapted into children's books, opera, plays, and more recently into animation. Although the authors of the individual tales are unknown, the collection has become synonymous with the name Lady Charlotte Guest, ever since she introduced the texts (in both Welsh and English) to the English-speaking world through her translation, first published in instalments between 1838 and 1849.

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Below are words from *The Mabinogion* with stories of their own.

### ACCOUTER

To “accouter” is to provide with dress or equipment, especially military. “Disaccouter,” then, is the opposite, to strip away dress and equipment.

### ARMORICA

“Armorica” (from Celtic *ar*, “on,” and *mor*, “sea”) is the Latin name for the northwestern extremity of Gaul, now Brittany. In Celtic, Roman, and Frankish times, Armorica included the western part of what later became Normandy. It received many immigrants from the British Isles in the 5th and 6th centuries, during the time of the Saxon invasion.

### BADGER-IN-THE-BAG

“Badger-in-the-bag” is simply the name given to the specific type of contest intended to trick and outwit someone. The contest is meant to show which one of two rivals of equal strength and stature has mastery over the other and no badgers ever had any part in it.

The bag in the game is magical—it cannot be filled, no matter how much food is put into it—and serves to trick the hero's opponent into the bag, where he can be beaten or killed.

It is true that real badgers were caught with the help of a bag. Rather than digging them out, a strongly-made sack was placed in the entrance to the sett, the badgers' underground den, after the badgers had left to forage during the night. When an animal returned, hurrying home, it ran into the sack and was thus captured. It was not usually killed but kept for baiting.

Beating badgers to make them more aggressive during the baiting did occur, and this probably gave rise to the modern verb "to badger" meaning "to harass or urge persistently; pester, nag."

## BARD

A "bard" may be any of the following:

- one of an ancient Celtic order of composers and reciters of poetry
- anyone who composed and recited epic poems, often while playing the harp

As a verb, "to bard" means:

- to equip (a horse) with bards
- to cover meat in thin pieces of bacon or fat to preserve moisture during cooking

In Celtic cultures, a bard is a professional story teller, verse-maker, music composer, oral historian and genealogist, employed by a patron (such as a king or chieftain) to commemorate ancestors and to praise the patron's own activities.

With the decline of a living bardic tradition in the modern period, the term has loosened to mean a generic minstrel or author, especially a famous one. For example, William Shakespeare and Rabindranath Tagore are respectively

known as “the Bard of Avon” and “the Bard of Bengal.” In 16th-century Scotland, it became a derogatory term for an itinerant musician.

Bards were those who sang the songs recalling the tribal warriors’ deeds of bravery as well as the genealogies and family histories of the ruling strata among Celtic societies. The pre-Christian Celtic people had no written histories; however, Celtic peoples did maintain an intricate oral history committed to memory and transmitted by bards. Bards facilitated the memorization of such materials by the use of meter, rhyme and other formulaic poetic devices.

The work of a number of bards in Welsh mythology have been preserved in medieval Welsh literature such as the *Red Book of Hergest*, the *White Book of Rhydderch*, the *Book of Aneirin* and the *Book of Taliesin*. The bards Aneirin and Taliesin may be legendary reflections of historical bards active in the 6th and 7th centuries.

The Welsh Laws of Hywel Dda, originally compiled around 900, identify a bard as a member of a king’s household. His duties, when the bodyguard were sharing out booty, included the singing of the sovereignty of Britain.

A large number of Welsh bards were blind people.

The royal form of bardic tradition ceased in the 13th century, when the 1282 Edwardian conquest permanently ended the rule of the Welsh princes. However, the poetic and musical traditions were continued throughout the Middle Ages by noted 14th-century poets Dafydd ap Gwilym and Iolo Goch. Also, the tradition of regularly assembling bards at an eisteddfod never lapsed and was strengthened by formation of the Gorsedd by Iolo Morganwg in 1792.

Wales in the twenty-first century is a leading Celtic upholder of the bardic tradition.

### BEACON CARN

A “beacon” is a sign or object meant to be a warning or a guide, perhaps as a signal fire to warn that an enemy is approaching. For seafarers, a beacon is a signal, buoy, post, or other conspicuous mark erected on a hill, or an island, or moored in shoal water, to warn of danger.

“Carn” is the archaic or Celtic form of “cairn.” A cairn is a human-made pile (or stack) of stones raised for a purpose, usually as a marker or as a burial mound.

In medieval days, a “beacon carn” would mean a fire (the beacon) burning atop a platform of stone or rocks (the carn), on top of a hill, as a signal to people in the surrounding area.

Today, cairns are often raised as landmarks, especially to mark trails or the summits of mountains. They vary in size from small stone markers to entire artificial hills, and in complexity from loose conical rock piles to elaborate megalithic structures. Cairns may be painted or otherwise decorated, whether for increased visibility or for religious reasons.

In Highland folklore, it is recounted that before Highland clans fought in a battle, each man would place a stone in a pile. Those who survived the battle returned and removed a stone from the pile. The stones that remained were built into a cairn to honor the dead.

### BETIDE

When something “betides” you, it happens to you. “Betide” is a literary way of saying “happen to,” like this quote from Jane Austin’s *Persuasion*, “Woe betide him, and her too, when it comes to things of consequence...”

Betide means the same thing as bechance and befall.

The word “tide” originated from the obsolete Old English word *tīdan*, used to mean “befall,” while “woe” means



“distress.” When combined, these words are meant to warn someone of the possible consequences of their bad behavior.

We now use the word ‘tide’ only to denote the regular rising and falling of the sea. We can better understand what ‘tide’ and ‘betide’ mean by substituting ‘tide’ with ‘time,’ which is just what the medieval clerics did—the two words were almost synonymous. Knowing that ‘tide’ means ‘period of time’ or ‘season,’ we see that a lunar tide can be translated as ‘a time of approximately twelve and a half hours’ and ‘woe betide you’ as ‘you are in for a bad time.’

The tide/time transliteration also survives in ‘good tidings,’ ‘tide over,’ ‘for a time,’ and in the names of festivals like Whitsuntide. We can also shorten the phrase ‘time and tide wait for no man’ if we wish, as one word just repeats the other.

### **BETOOK**

“Betook” is the past tense of “betake.” It means having caused oneself to go somewhere, to resort to, or have recourse to. “I betook myself once more to my nap.”

### **BEWAIL**

To “bewail” is to mourn aloud, to express great sorrow, disappointment, or bitterness over something. For example, “The knight departed and she bewailed his passing.”

### **BIER**

A “bier” is a movable frame on which a coffin or a corpse is placed before burial or cremation or on which it is carried to the grave. “They lifted the coffin onto the bier.”

The bier is a flat frame, traditionally wooden but sometimes of other materials. In antiquity it was often a wooden board on which the dead were placed, covered with a shroud. In modern times, the corpse is rarely carried on a bier without being first placed in a coffin or casket.

A bier is often draped with cloth. The modern funeral industry uses a collapsible aluminum bier on wheels, known as a “church truck” to move the coffin to and from the church or funeral home for services.

Biers are generally smaller than the coffin or casket they support for reasons of appearance. As a result, they are not particularly stable, and can tip over unless well-centered and undisturbed.

### **BOON**

“It is to crave a boon of thee that I come.”

“Boon” has several meanings:

- something extremely useful, helpful, or beneficial
- a favor; a request: “he asked a boon of the king”
- friendly: “a boon companion to all”

A boon means something beneficial to a specific person, entity, or cause. It’s a favor that no one has necessarily asked for, something extra. “Finding the dry cave was a boon to the weary travelers.”

The word arises from Old English bone, a petition, a prayer.

### **BOSS**

Like many words that have traveled the centuries from the Middle Ages or even earlier, “boss” has accumulated several meanings.

As a noun, it can mean

- a protuberant part: a boss on an animal’s horn
- a raised ornamentation (stud), as on a belt or shield
- an ornamental projecting block used in architecture
- a soft pad used in ceramics or gardening
- the hub of a propeller
- a person who exercises control or authority
- a politician who controls votes in a party organization

As a verb, “boss” may mean:

- to ornament with bosses, to emboss
- to give someone orders, to exercise control

And finally, as an adjective:

- excellent, first-rate (slang)

The word was borrowed from Dutch *baas* “master, or person in authority.” English has borrowed several words from Dutch, including *dope*, *stoop* (porch), and *Santa Claus*.

### BRAGGET

“Bragget” or “braggot” (all spelling variants derive from Old Celtic) is a drink made from spiced and sweetened ale and fermented honey, similar to mead and metheglin.

Bragget was mentioned by Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*, and it has become a catchword for sweetness, as in ‘Braggot Sunday’ in Mid-Lent, when a brief suspension of abstinence was allowed.

(See the chapter *Fabulous Feasts* for a recipe.)

### BURROW

“They called him *Kilhwch*, because he had been found in a swine’s burrow.”

A “burrow” is a tunnel dug by a small animal, especially a rabbit, as a dwelling. The more general meaning is “a narrow or snug place.”

### BUSKIN

A “buskin” is a knee-or calf-length thick-soled boot made of leather or cloth. It is laced from above the toes to the top of the boot, and open across the toes.

A high-heeled buskin was worn by Athenian tragic actors to

make them look taller. Buskins therefore sometimes appear as a symbol of tragedy, often contrasted with a “sock” (from Latin *soccus*), the low shoe worn by comedians.

The buskin was also worn by hunters, and soldiers in Ancient Greek, Etruscan, and Roman societies, to protect the lower legs against thorns and dirt. And perhaps the odd kick in the shins?

Byzantine emperors were formally clad in purple buskins, embroidered in gold with double-headed eagles. These would have been for decoration, for it’s unlikely that Byzantine emperors needed to worry about being kicked in the shin.

### CAER LLUDD

“And though he had many castles and cities this one loved he more than any. And he dwelt therein most part of the year, and therefore was it called Caer Lludd, and at last Caer London. And after the stranger-race came there, it was called London.”

London now is the capital and largest city of both England and the United Kingdom, with a population of around 8.8 million, and its metropolitan area is the largest in Western Europe, with a population of 14.9 million. It has been a major settlement for nearly two millennia.

“London” is an ancient name, first seen written so in the first century CE, usually in the Latinized form *Londinium*. Versions found in early sources include *Londinium* (Latin), *Lunden* (Old English), and *Llundein* (Welsh). It is agreed that the name came into these languages from Common Brythonic.

### CANTREF

In medieval Wales, for legal and administrative purposes, the country was divided into “cantrefs,” which were relatively large areas (like US counties) and “commotes,” which were smaller jurisdictions.

The word “cantref” is derived from cant (a hundred) and tref (town).” Alternate spellings are “cantrev,” “cantred,” and “canthrif.” A commote is a community, the word ultimately deriving from the same root as compatriot and neighbor.

The antiquity of the cantrefi is demonstrated by the fact that they often mark the boundary between dialects. Some were originally kingdoms in their own right; others may have been artificial units created later.

Cantrefi were important in the administration of Welsh law. Each cantref had its own court, which was an assembly of the uchelwyr, the main landowners of the cantref. This would be presided over by the king or his representative. Apart from the judges there would be a clerk, an usher and sometimes two professional pleaders. The cantref court dealt with crimes, the determination of boundaries, and inheritance. The commote court later took over many of the functions of the cantref court.

### CASKET

A “casket” can mean a coffin, or a small box in which jewelry or other precious items are kept. Most caskets, both large and small, are made of wood—some plain, and others more ornamental.

The word arises from the Old French *cassette*, a diminutive form of case or chest.

Casket may also refer to:

—Casket (solitaire), a card game

—The Casket, a weekly newspaper published in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

### CAULDRON

A “cauldron” is a large pot, usually made of cast iron, often with a lid and handle, used for cooking or boiling things over an open fire. Today, the word is sometimes used figuratively,

as in “a cauldron of repressed anger,” suggesting that the anger resembles the frantic activity of boiling water.

Cauldrons can be found from the late Bronze Age period; these include huge ones with a volume of 16 to 18 gallons.

These large pots are rarely used now as cooking vessels. A more common association in Western culture is the cauldron’s use in witchcraft—a cliché popularized by various works of fiction, such as William Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*. Here, the witches prepare a concoction that consists of “Eye of newt and toe of frog, Wool of bat and tongue of dog...” Apparently, these terms refer to plants, not actual animal parts. For example, “eye of newt” is a pseudonym for mustard seed.

In Irish folklore, a cauldron is purported to be where leprechauns keep their gold and treasure.

Welsh legend tells of cauldrons that were useful to warring armies. The tale of *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, tells of a magical cauldron in which dead warriors could be placed and then be returned to life, save that they lacked the power of speech. These warriors could go back into battle until they were killed again. Obviously, the first attempt at renewable resources.

The Holy Grail of Arthurian legend is sometimes referred to as a “cauldron,” although traditionally the grail is thought of as a hand-held cup.

### CHAPLET

“Chaplets of ruddy gold bound their hair.”

A “chaplet” is an ornamental wreath of flowers to be worn on the head, or a string of beads. The word comes from Middle English chapelet, and originally from Medieval Latin *cappellus* (head covering). A chaplet could also be made of gold.

In architecture, a chaplet is a small molding carved to resemble a string of beads.

## CHESS

“Chess” is a game of strategic skill for two players, each of whom moves 16 pieces according to fixed rules across a checkerboard. The object is to put the opponent’s king under a direct attack from which escape is impossible (checkmate).

Chess simulates a war between two kingdoms. The original word for “chess” is Sanskrit *chaturanga* “four members of an army” — elephant, horse, chariot, and foot soldier.

The game involves no hidden information and no elements of chance. The players, referred to as “White” and “Black,” each control sixteen pieces: one king, one queen, two rooks, two bishops, two knights, and eight pawns. White moves first, followed by Black. There are several ways a game can end in a draw.

The recorded history of chess goes back at least to a similar game in seventh-century India. Today, chess is one of the world’s most popular games, and is played by millions of people worldwide.

And, if anybody’s interested, “chess” is also a weedy annual European brome-grass (*Bromus secalinus*) widely naturalized in North America as a weed, especially in grain.

## CLOVEN

“The knight’s helmet was cloven in twain.” (See below for definition of “twain.”)

“Cloven” is the past participle of cleave. “Cleave” has the following meanings:

- to adhere firmly and closely (cleave to)
- to divide by or as if by a cutting blow
- to separate into distinct parts
- to subject to chemical separation
- to split, especially along the natural line or grain
- to penetrate something as if by cutting

Cleave is one of those rare words known as a contronym

(alternate spelling is *contranym*): words that have two meanings that contradict one another. It can mean either “stick together” (cleave to tradition) or “split apart” (cloven in twain).

### **COLLOP**

A “collop” is a small slice, portion, or piece of anything, but especially of meat. “Lamb collops were included on the breakfast menu for first-class passengers of the Titanic in 1912.” The word is also used to describe a fold or roll of flesh on the body.

In olden days, when a man wanted dinner, he could broil meat in small chunks on the coals. It’s simple, requiring no cooking-vessels. It may be held to the fire on a twig, (something like a Turkish kebob) or laid on the coals and turned by a similar twig or even by the fingers. Today we call the twigs “barbecue skewers” and sell them by the million.

In Ireland, however, a collop was a measure of land sufficient to graze one cow.

### **COMPASSED**

“For I have compassed the object of my mission.”

To “compass” can mean to go around something in a circular course. More commonly, it means to accomplish something, or to comprehend, to understand.

### **CORANIANS**

“When Lludd was king of Britain, the country was harassed by three plagues: The first was the Coranians.”

The “Coranians,” who were sorcerers, had three qualities that made them a plague. First, they paid their way in “fairy money,” literally, “dwarf’s money.” This money appeared to be good coin but, if kept, turned into something useless, like



pieces of fungus. Second, they could hear everything that was said over the whole of Britain, in however low a tone, if only the wind met it. Third, they could not be harmed by any weapon.

In the tale, with the help of a long horn that muffles their conversation, Lludd asks his brother Llefelys, king of France, for advice on the problem. Llefelys tells him that a certain insect crushed up and mixed with water is deadly to the Coranians, but harmless to the Britons. Lludd crushes up the insects and calls a meeting of all his people and all the Coranians, then throws the concoction over the whole crowd, thereby killing the Coranians without harming his people. He saves some of the insects for breeding in case the plague ever returns to Britain.

### **CORDWAINER**

A “cordwainer” is a shoemaker, an artisan trained in crafting new shoes from new leather.

British tradition distinguishes the terms cordwainer and cobbler, restricting cobblers to repairing shoes. Medieval cordwainers used cordovan leather for high-quality shoes, but also used domestically produced leathers for cheaper luxury footwear.

### **CORDWAL**

“So he began by buying the best cordwal that could be had...and he associated himself with the best goldsmith in the town, and caused him to make clasps for the shoes, and to gild the clasps, and he marked how it was done until he learnt the method.”

“Cordwal” is cordovan leather, which derived its name from Cordova, where it was manufactured.

### **COSTREL**

A “costrel” is a bottle made of earthenware, leather, or wood, having loops by which it was attached to the belt of the user. It was also called a wineskin or a pilgrim bottle.

### **COVENANT**

A “covenant” is a formal, solemn, and binding agreement, a promise, a pact. It is normally a written agreement, usually under seal, between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action.

### **CRAFT**

Pryderi and Manawyddan went from city to city, always having to leave one for another because their workmanship eventually outshone the other crafters', who wanted to kill them for interfering with their livelihoods. “What craft shall we take?” said Pryderi. “We will make shields,” said Manawyddan.

A “craft” is primarily defined as an activity, occupation, or trade involving skill in making things by hand, though the word is also used to describe a ship or other vessel.

A craft or trade is a pastime or an occupation that requires particular skills and knowledge of skilled work. In the Middle Ages and earlier, the term was usually applied to people occupied in small scale production of goods, or their maintenance, for example, shoemakers and tinkers. Today, a craftsman is more usually called an artisan or craftsperson.

Historically, the more specialized crafts with high-value products tended to concentrate in urban centers and their practitioners formed guilds. The skill required by their professions and the need to be permanently involved in the exchange of goods often demanded a higher level of education, and craftspeople were usually in a more privileged position than the peasantry in social hierarchy.

However, the households of artisans were not as self-sufficient as those of people engaged in agricultural work, and therefore had to rely on the exchange of goods. Some crafts, especially in areas such as pottery, woodworking, and various stages of textile production, could be practiced on a part-time basis by those also working in agriculture, and often formed part of village life.

But crafts underwent deep changes during and since the Industrial Revolution. The mass production of goods by large-scale industry has more or less limited the market for crafts.

### **CROFT**

“And then he began to prepare some ground, and he sowed a croft.”

A “croft” is a traditional Scottish term for a fenced or enclosed area of land, usually small and arable, and usually, but not always, with a crofter’s dwelling thereon. A crofter is one who has tenure and use of the land, typically as a tenant farmer, especially in rural areas.

### **CROZIER**

A “crozier” is a staff, resembling a shepherd’s crook, carried by a bishop as a symbol of pastoral office. The word is also used to describe the curled top of a young fern.

Shepherd’s croziers are made of wood. Bishop’s croziers are often made or decorated in precious metals, or are at least gilded or silver-plated.

### **CRUPPER**

A “crupper” may mean a strap buckled to the back of a saddle and looped under the horse’s tail to prevent the saddle or harness from slipping forward, or it may mean simply the rump of a horse.

### CUDGEL

As a noun, “cudgel” means a thick club or stick, used as a weapon. A rioting mob might be armed with cudgels.

Cudgels have been used since prehistory. There are several examples of blunt-force trauma caused by clubs in the past, including at the site of Nataruk in Turkana, Kenya, described as the scene of a prehistoric conflict between bands of hunter-gatherers 10,000 years ago.

Most clubs are small enough to be swung with one hand. Various specialized clubs are used in martial arts and other fields, including the law-enforcement baton. The military mace is a more sophisticated descendant of the club, typically made of metal and featuring a spiked, knobbed, or flanged head attached to a shaft. Ceremonial maces may also be displayed as a symbol of governmental authority.

As a verb, we use “cudgel” to say “I must cudgel my brains to find a solution.” Of course, if you get hit in the head with a cudgel, you may have no brains left to cudgel.

### CYMRY

“Cymry” means the Welsh, or the branch of the Celtic people to which the Welsh belong, comprising also the Cornish people and the Bretons.

### DELIVER

“And through fear of the swine the queen was delivered.”

“Deliver” has several meanings:

- to bring and hand over mail or goods
- to bring (votes) to support a candidate or cause
- to give produce: “The oil well delivers 500 barrels a day.”
- to strike or throw: “to deliver a blow”
- to set free: “delivered them from bondage”
- to give birth
- to assist at the birth of: “The doctor delivered the baby.”

- to speak or sing: “deliver a sermon, a song, a speech”
- to do or carry out something as promised
- to set free from confinement or danger

Our modern idiom, “deliver the goods,” seems to pretty well cover it.

### **DEMEANOR**

“Demeanor” means outward behavior and appearance, a way of looking and behaving. “The king has a regal demeanor.”

### **DESCRY**

“Thereupon Owain descried a vast and resplendent castle.”

To “descry” is an obsolete word meaning to catch sight of or to discover by careful observation. “She descried a rare bird in the oak tree.”

It’s easy to confuse “descry” with “decry,” which means to express strong disapproval. Pronunciation is key—the s in descry is not silent. Descry sounds just like the English verb describe without its closing b. When you descry something, it becomes known to you either by discovery or understanding, as though it were well-described. Decry, on the other hand, emphasizes cry when spoken, and shares roots with cry as well: when you decry something, you might be said to cry loudly your complaint.

### **DESERT**

“And he came to a vast desert wood.”

At first glance, “desert” here seems to be an abbreviation of “deserted.” However, the answer is likely that “desert” had a somewhat different meaning in the Middle Ages, especially considering that Britain has nothing remotely resembling places like the Mojave or Sahara Deserts.

The writer who penned a book called *Greate Buffaloe Swamp* (about an area of Pennsylvania in the 16th or 17th century) told us that “swamp” in the title doesn’t mean what we think of as a swamp nowadays. Then, it merely meant an undeveloped area, that may or may not sustain human life in the future.

Therefore, we believe that “vast desert wood” means an unspoiled tract of forest, an area not yet “developed” by humans.

### DIAPERED SATIN

In *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, there is “a carpet of diapered satin.”

“Diaper” refers to any small geometrical or floral pattern that consists of the constant repetition of one or more simple figures or units of design evenly spaced. The term was initially associated with silk with diamond patterns and later applied to linen and cotton fabrics of similar designs. Terms such as “bird’s eye” or “pheasant’s eye” refer to the size of the diamond in the design. White linen or cotton diaper has been used for tablecloths. Silk or satin diaper may be used for rich clothing.

The first cloth diapers consisted of soft fabric cut into geometric shapes and this pattern was called “diapering.”

The term “diaper” comes from the Latin word “diasper,” which denotes rough and uneven texture and from the Low Latin term *diasperus*, which referred to a particular type of cloth.

### DISARRAY

“He went into the hall to disarray, and there came youths and pages and disarrayed him.”

We usually take “disarray” to mean a lack of order or

sequence. But it can also be used as a verb meaning to “undress” since it’s the reverse form of “array” which means “to dress.”

In the late Middle Ages, it could mean to “break up military formation,” and, in a more general sense, to “throw out of arrangement or into disorder.”

## DWARF

As a noun, “dwarf” means either of the following:

—(in folklore or fantasy literature) a member of a mythical race of short, stocky humanlike creatures who are generally skilled in mining and metalworking.

—denoting something, especially an animal or plant, that is much smaller than the usual size for its type or species. For example, “a dwarf conifer.”

As a verb, “to dwarf” something means to make it seem small or insignificant in comparison. “The castle dominated and dwarfed the surrounding structures.”

Modern English has two plurals for the word dwarf: dwarfs and dwarves. “Dwarfs” remains the most common version. “Dwarves” was popularized by the fiction of author J. R. R. Tolkien. Regarding his use of this plural, Tolkien wrote in 1937, “I am afraid it is just a piece of private bad grammar, rather shocking in a philologist; but I shall have to go with it.”

Accounts of dwarfs vary significantly throughout history and one theory suggests they may have originated as nature spirits. Dwarfs continue to feature in modern popular culture, such as in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and Terry Pratchett, where they are often, but not exclusively, presented as distinct from elves. They are often depicted as miners, smiths, armorers, tailors, carpenters, artisans and mechanics.

We wonder if the human tongue finds “dwarves” easier to pronounce than “dwarfs.” One of us wants to say “rooves” instead of “roofs.”

**ELL**

“... sharp, well-tempered, headed with steel, three ells in length, of an edge to wound...”

The word “ell” has three meanings:

- an obsolete measure of length equal to about 45 inches
- an elbow in a pipe or conduit
- a building wing, usually at right angles to the main structure

The “ell,” as a unit of measurement, was originally understood as a cubit (the combined length of the forearm and extended hand). “Ell” literally means “arm,” and survives in the form of the modern English word “elbow” (arm-bend).

An ell-wand (or ellwand) was a rod one ell long used for official measurement. Edward I of England required that every town have one. In Scotland, the Belt of Orion was called “the King’s Ellwand.” An iron ellwand is preserved in the entrance to Stånga Church on the Swedish island of Gotland, indicating the role that rural churches had in encouraging uniform measures.

**ENGLYN**

“And together with this they were great chroniclers, and recorders, and skilful in framing verses, and ready in making englyns in every one of those languages.”

An “englyn” is a traditional Welsh short poem form. It uses quantitative meters, involving the counting of syllables, and rigid patterns of rhyme and half rhyme. Each line contains a repeating pattern of consonants and accent.

**FLOWER OF THE BROOM**

In one of the stories, a woman’s dress is compared to the “flower of the broom.” For many people, the word “broom” will bring to mind the tool one uses to sweep the floor. But “broom” is another name for the shrub known as gorse. Gorse is a large, wild bush with sharp thorns and, when in bloom,



covered with small, bright yellow flowers.

“Broom” is a popular name for several types of shrubs common throughout Europe which have been used for both medicine and fuel. And yes, it can be a broom, too, as shown by this quote from the 1300s, “twigs of broom tied together to a handle to make a tool for sweeping.”

In many parts of North America, broom is regarded as wicked and invasive. But we have rarely seen a sight more beautiful than rolling hills covered in blooming gorse, the brilliant yellow flowers like trillions of miniature suns.

### **FORK**

A “fork” is an implement with two or more prongs used for lifting food to the mouth or holding it when cutting. In a much larger form, it’s a tool for pitching or digging or killing people. In one of the stories, Peredur used forks as his weapon of choice.

Two other meanings are:

—the point where something, especially a road or river, divides into two parts

—an attack by one chess piece (such as a knight) on two pieces simultaneously

Forks have been around for a long time. Bone forks were found in archaeological sites of the Bronze Age circa 2400–1900 BCE. In the Roman Empire, bronze and silver forks were used, many surviving examples of which are displayed in museums around Europe. The way forks were employed varied according to local customs, social class, and the type of food, but in earlier periods forks were mostly used as cooking and serving utensils.

### **FORTHWITH**

“Forthwith” is an old word that means immediately.

“The Ministry of Magic has revised its decision to destroy your wand forthwith. You may retain your wand until your disciplinary hearing.” (J. K. Rowling)

#### FOUR-AND-TWENTY

“He entered the hall, and beheld four-and-twenty ladies, the fairest that could be seen.” “Four-and-twenty” is just an old-fashioned way of saying twenty-four.

It may be old-fashioned, but we like the way it sounds. It reminds us of the English nursery rhyme, *Sing a Song of Sixpence*, which originated in the 18th century. The sixpence in the rhyme is a British coin that was first minted in 1551.

The first verse (there are many):

Sing a song of six-pence, a pocket full of rye.

Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.

When the pie was opened, the birds began to sing.

Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?

(See the chapter *Fabulous Feasts* for the recipe.)

#### FRONTLET

A “frontlet,” as with many old words, has several meanings:  
—an ornamental piece of cloth hanging over the upper part of an altar frontal

—a decorative band or ornament worn on the forehead

—the forehead of an animal, especially a deer or stag

—the forehead of a bird when marked by a distinctive color or texture of the plumage

—band worn across the forehead and over the hair, often ornamented with pearls, gems, or other similar decoration

#### FUNGUS

“And I will give these twelve horses, all caparisoned as they are, with their saddles and their bridles, and these twelve greyhounds, with their collars and their leashes as thou seest,

and the twelve gilded shields that thou beholdest yonder.' Now these he had formed of fungus." (Math the son of Mathonwy)

A "fungus" is any of a group of spore-producing organisms, including molds, yeast, mushrooms, and toadstools.

The word is adopted from the Latin *fungus* (mushroom), used in the writings of Horace and Pliny.

Fungi are everywhere. Mushrooms are fungi. And bread is made with yeast, another fungus. Old bread may grow mold, still another fungus. Athlete's foot and a variety of other infections are caused by fungi, but, on the good side, a fungus also produces the medicine penicillin. About 100,000 different species of fungi exist. When you see a light-colored splat on a tree or rock in the woods, it is probably a lichen, which is a fungus and an alga living in a symbiotic relationship, benefiting each other. Fungi are neither plants nor animals; they are different enough to be classified by scientists as their own unique kingdom.

And they are not so magic that they can be formed into horses and greyhounds. Except in a story, of course.

### GILD

"To gild" means to cover thinly with gold, inferring, perhaps, a falsely attractive or valuable appearance. "She does not need to gild the lily by wearing perfume." In the Middle Ages, the word could also have meant to smear with blood.

Gilding is a decorative technique for applying a very thin coating of gold over solid surfaces such as metal (most common), wood, porcelain, or stone. A gilded object is also described as "gilt." Where metal was gilded, the metal was traditionally silver in the West, to make silver-gilt (or vermeil) objects, but gilt-bronze was commonly used in China, and also called ormolu in the West. Methods of gilding include hand application and gluing, typically of gold leaf, chemical gilding, and electroplating, the last also called gold plating.

Gilding gives an object a gold appearance at a fraction of the cost of creating a solid gold object. In addition, a solid gold piece would often be too soft or too heavy for practical use. Another advantage is that a gilt surface also does not tarnish as silver does.

Herodotus mentions that the Egyptians gilded wood and metals, and many such objects have been excavated. Today, gilding is applied to numerous and diverse surfaces and by various processes.

Pliny the Elder recorded that the first gilding seen at Rome was after the destruction of Carthage, when the Romans began to gild the ceilings of their temples and palaces, the Capitol being the first place where this process was used. Gilding became a popular luxury within Rome soon after the introduction of the technique, with gilding being seen on the walls, vaults and inside the houses of anyone who could afford it, including the poor. Owing to the comparative thickness of the gold leaf used in ancient gilding, the remaining traces of it are remarkably brilliant and solid.

### **HAMPER**

“When Lludd was king of Britain, the country was harassed by three plagues: The third was the giant who wore strong, heavy armor and carried a hamper.”

Today, a “hamper” is a large basket with a hinged lid. If it has a handle, it’s a picnic basket. Used as a verb, it means to impede, disrupt, curb, restrain, interfere with, hold back, or hinder.

But, in the case of this story, it’s a magic basket.

The giant’s nocturnal entrance was heralded by soporific illusions and musical sounds which lulled the members of Lludd’s Court to sleep. Once the court was asleep, he would put all the provisions of meat and drink of Lludd’s Court into his commodious hamper and take it away with him. Lludd had

to confront the intruder. He was able to avoid falling asleep to the soporific illusions by frequently dipping his head in a vessel of cold water by his side. Upon confronting the giant, a fierce encounter ensued in which glittering fire flew out from their arms until Lludd overcame him. Thereupon, Lludd granted him mercy and made him his loyal vassal.

Lludd was a lot more forgiving than we would have been. Steal our gold, okay. But steal our food? Never!

### **HANDMAIDEN**

A “handmaiden” is a personal maid or female servant, someone or something whose essential function is to serve or assist. “The princess would allow only her handmaiden to enter her chambers.”

### **HARBORAGE**

“Harborage” means shelter or refuge. “Some had craved harborage of Arthur.”

### **HAW**

“Gwiawn Llygad Cath (who could cut a haw from the eye of the gnat without hurting him) ...”

“Haw” is another old word with several meanings:

- enclosure, hedge
- a hawthorn berry
- a hawthorn or similar tree
- used by a speaker who is fumbling for words
- nictitating eye membrane of some mammals such as cats and horses
- a command to an animal to turn left (“gee” is right)

To “hem and haw” is to speak indistinctly, making frequent pauses. More generally, hemming and hawing means acting indecisively.

### HELP-MATE

“Help-mate” is a variation of “helpmeet” and means a companion or partner, especially one’s spouse.

### HENCE

“Hence” means “for this reason,” or “therefore.” It can also mean forward from this time.

“The knight is leaving; hence my tears.” The word can be used as well in an exclamation such as “Get you hence!” meaning “begone!”

Hence, thence, and whence still have some literary use, though whence is now rare, having been replaced in modern English by ‘where from.’ Hence is the most complex form, having meanings of place, time, and result. It also enters into the occasional compound formation.

Here are some examples of how the words were or are used:

- He is even now gone hence: (away from this place)
- I’ll meet you an hour hence: (from now, from this time)
- We henceforth shall be twain: (from this time forth; from now on)
- Henceforward all things shall be in common: (from now on)
- Thence I have followed it: (away from that place)
- Whence cometh this alarum?: (from which / what place)
- Sent from my brother whencesoever: (from whatever place)

### HERALD

“Now this was the guise in which the messengers journeyed; one sleeve was on the cap of each of them in front, as a sign that they were messengers, in order that through what hostile land soever they might pass no harm might be done them.”

A Christian king could not claim God’s blessing on his wars against his neighbors unless he first declared his belligerent intentions by means of a formal declaration of war, which in that era took the form of the *diffidatio*, or formal “defiance,”

delivered in person by an officially designated and recognized representative. This was most often the function of the herald.

Heralds served several roles in the medieval world, both in times of war and peace, but they were frequently tasked with carrying messages of defiance between warring kings, or between kings who were about to go to war with each other. In an era when dress and insignia carried great significance and were increasingly regulated, heralds carried white wands or batons as a visible sign of the immunity inferred upon them by their positions and diplomatic missions.

We were unable to find an explanation for the words in the quotation, "one sleeve was on the cap of each of them in front." But we can accept that it was a kind of sign which meant they were carrying messages and therefore not to be harmed.

### HIND

The red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) is one of the largest deer species. A male red deer is called a stag or hart, and a female is called a doe or hind. The red deer inhabits most of Europe and parts of western Asia. It is also the only living species of deer to inhabit Africa. Red deer have been introduced to other areas, including Australia, New Zealand, Peru, Canada, the United States, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina. In many parts of the world, the meat (venison) from red deer is used as a food.

### HOARY-HEADED

"Hoary-headed" is an adjective, describing characteristics of age, especially having gray or white hair or having lived for a relatively long time. "He nodded his hoary head."

For bird lovers, the Hoary-headed Grebe (*Poliocephalus poliocephalus*) is a member of the grebe family found in Australia and New Zealand. The bird takes its name from the silvery-white streaking on its black head.

### HORSEBLOCK

A “horseblock” is a block, a step, or a platform for use in mounting or dismounting from a horse or entering or leaving a vehicle.

### HOST

“Send a youth,” said she, “to ask who yonder host may be.”

In this instance, a “host” is a great number, a multitude, an army. But it also means a person who entertains other people as guests, and an animal or plant on or in which a parasite lives.

As a verb, “to host” means to act as host at an event, or to use a computer as a server to store a website or other data.

Can we infer from the definitions that some guests are parasites?

### HOUSINGS

“And they betook themselves to making saddles. And Manawyddan began to make housings, and he gilded and coloured them with blue enamel.”

*Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* says that a “housing” is:

- a rigid casing that encloses and protects a piece of moving or delicate equipment
- anything that covers or protects
- a cloth covering for the back and flanks of a horse or other animal
- the trappings on a horse (archaic)

“The trappings on a horse” is the term we want, and medieval saddles, built from thick leather (as well as wood and linen), were often richly decorated and designed to offer comfort and safety to riders. Saddlery craftsmen in the Middle Ages used specific methods to make saddles and saddlery accessories.



In general, the Medieval saddle was made to keep the rider safe and stable, while the modern English saddle has been designed to provide the rider freedom of movement.

Enamel is a decorative glass-like substance that is melted onto clay, metal, or glass objects, and then left to cool and become hard. Blue was and is a popular color.

Throughout history, jewelry has been made more colorful by the application of enamels. Similarly, arms and armor, horse trappings, and even domestic items, such as mirrors and hanging bowls, were embellished with enamel decoration. Throughout the Middle Ages, both secular and ecclesiastical objects, such as chalices, cups, reliquaries, caskets, crosiers (a staff carried by bishops and abbots as a symbol of office), and spoons, were elaborately enameled.

Enameled horse trappings have been found in many places in the British Isles. This type of Celtic enameling of the Roman period lived on in northwest Europe, particularly in Ireland, until as late as the 12th century.

## **ILL-FAVORED**

Ugly.

## **KINE**

“Kine” is an archaic word meaning cows or cattle. “Kine” is the only plural word in the English language that shares no similar letters with its singular, “cow.”

## **KISTVAEN**

A “kistvaen” (or cistvaen) is a tomb or burial chamber formed from flat stone slabs in a box-like shape. If set completely underground, it may be covered by a mound of earth, also known as a barrow. The word is derived from the Welsh *cist* (chest) and *maen* (stone). The term originated in relation to Celtic structures, typically pre-Christian.

Kistvaens are formed using flat stones for the sides and for the ends, and a larger flat stone (the “capstone”) for the cover. Some kistvaens are surrounded by circles of erected stones. In general, if a body was to be buried without cremation, it was placed into a kistvaen in a contracted position. If on the other hand a body was cremated, the ashes were usually put in a cinerary urn, and then the urn was placed in a kistvaen.

However, the majority of the known Dartmoor kistvaens were opened at some time in the past, and whatever they used to hold is missing. The cists were probably robbed in the hope of finding treasure. Kistvaens were known by many common names, including “money pits,” “crocks of gold,” “caves,” “Roman graves,” and so on. The idea that ancient tombs might contain valuable items is a very old one; one of the first mentions of searching tumuli in Devon dates back to 1324.

## LO

“Lo” is an archaic exclamation, used to draw attention to an interesting or amazing event.

It may also be an exclamation of grief, joy, or mere greeting. We’ve all heard the expression “lo and behold” which was first found in written records around 1770 and is, today, more often used in a humorous way.

## MAIDEN PORTION

A “maiden portion” is a dowry, the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband or his family in marriage.

A maiden portion, or dowry, is a payment, such as property or money, paid by the bride’s family to the groom or his family at the time of marriage. Dowry is the opposite of “bride price,” which is a payment by the groom, or his family, to the bride or her family.

Dowry is an ancient custom that is mentioned in some of the earliest writings, and its existence may well predate records of

it. Dowries continue to be expected and demanded as a condition to accept a marriage proposal in some parts of the world. The custom of dowry is most common in strongly patrilineal cultures that expect women to reside with or near their husband's family.

### MANCHET BREAD

“Manchet” (or michette) is a wheaten, yeast-leavened bread of very good quality, usually in the form of a small flat circular loaf, small enough to be held in the hand.

One of the first recipes printed in English for manchet breads comes from the 1588 recipe book *The Good Huswives Handmaide* by Thomas Dawson. In it the author explains that the flour must be fine and have been boulted (sifted) twice.

Bread was one of the most important components of the medieval diet, for all tiers of society. Most people in medieval Europe ate two to three pounds of bread and grains per day. The problem in trying to recreate these breads is that few recipes exist, especially from the early period of the Middle Ages. However, breads were made much like they are today, with ground grain, liquid, salt, and a raising agent. Yeast was the most common form of leavening agent, but because they lacked dry yeasts, bakers used “old dough” (like a sourdough starter), or “barm,” a liquid yeast which is a by-product of beer making.

The bread that fed the lower tiers of medieval society was made of whole-grain flours supplemented with ingredients such as oats, beans, and lentils. The most common bread was called maslin, but there was also one called horsebread, containing things like dry split peas and bran (and some was fed to horses, hence the name). The nobility, of course, tended to have bread made from fine white flour which produced a lighter bread with a finer texture. The finest of these breads was known as pandemain (lord's bread), made from flour sifted 2-3 times.

The horsebread sounds like bread you could really get your teeth into.

(See recipe in the chapter *Fabulous Feasts*.)

## MANURE

“Manure” is animal dung used for fertilizing land. In some areas of the world, it was dried and used for fuel.

The modern definition is “organic matter that is used as organic fertilizer in agriculture.” Most manure consists of animal feces; other sources include compost and green manure. Manures contribute to the fertility of soil by adding organic matter and nutrients, such as nitrogen, that are utilized by bacteria, fungi and other organisms in the soil. Higher organisms then feed on the fungi and bacteria in a chain of life that comprises the soil food web.

The word manure came from Middle English *manuren* meaning “to cultivate land.”

## MAY EVE

“May eve,” also known as Saint Walpurgis Night, is the eve of the Christian feast day of Saint Walpurga, an 8th-century abbess, and is celebrated on the night of 30 April and the day of 1 May. This feast commemorates the canonization of Saint Walpurga on 1 May 870.

The date of Saint Walpurgis Night coincided with an older May Eve festival, (such coincidence probably deliberately chosen by the Church) celebrated in much of northern Europe with the lighting of bonfires at night. A variety of festivals of pre-Christian origin had been celebrated at this time (halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice) to mark the beginning of summer. These included Beltane in Ireland and Britain.

Ancient Celts recognized only two seasons of the year, summer and winter, and their pivotal dates, Beltane and

Samhain, were very important in their implications for the world both seen and unseen.

May Eve was a time for divination. According to Donald Watts' *Dictionary of Plant Lore*, a girl would hang a flowering branch of hawthorn at a crossroads on this night. In the morning, she could determine the direction from which her future husband would arrive by the direction in which the wind had blown the branch. Apparently, gathering primroses and laying them before the doors of houses on May Eve also prevented the entrance of fairies.

Above all, Beltane is a Fire Festival. The word 'Beltane' originates from the Celtic God 'Bel,' meaning 'the bright one' and the Gaelic word 'teine' meaning fire. Together they make 'Bright Fire,' or 'Goodly Fire' and traditionally bonfires were lit to honor the Sun and encourage the support of Bel and the Sun's light to nurture the emerging future harvest and protect the community.

Another old tradition is dancing around the maypole on May Day. Many pagans celebrated Beltane by lighting fires and leaping over them, or with maypole dances, symbolizing the mystery of the Sacred Marriage of Goddess and God.

Beltane honors Life. Earth energies are at their strongest and most active. On May Eve the sexuality of life and the earth is at its peak. Abundant fertility, on all levels, is the central theme. For this is the night of the Greenwood Marriage. It is about sexuality and sensuality, passion, vitality and joy. And about conception. A brilliant moment in the Wheel of the Year to bring ideas, hopes and dreams into action.

### MEAD

"Mead" is a fermented alcoholic drink made of water, honey, malt, and yeast, and is most suitable for drinking on May Eve.

The defining characteristic of mead is that the majority of the beverage's fermentable sugar is derived from honey. It may be

still, carbonated, or naturally sparkling, and dry, semi-sweet, or sweet.

Mead that also contains spices is called *metheglin*, and mead that contains fruit is called *melomel*. The term *honey wine* is sometimes used as a synonym for mead, although “wine” is defined to be the product of fermented grapes.

Mead was produced in ancient times throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia, and has played an important role in the mythology of some peoples. In Norse mythology, for example, the Mead of Poetry, crafted from the blood of Kvasir, would turn anyone who drank it into a poet or scholar.

Mead seems to have been discovered prior to the advent of both agriculture and ceramic pottery in the Neolithic Age, due to the prevalence of naturally occurring fermentation and honey-producing insects worldwide. In Europe, mead is first described from residual samples found in ceramics of the Bell Beaker Culture (c. 2800–1800 BCE). Pottery vessels from northern China dating from at least 7000 BCE were discovered to contain chemical signatures for honey, rice, and organic compounds associated with fermentation.

During the Golden Age of ancient Greece, mead was said to be the preferred drink. The Hispanic-Roman naturalist Columella gave a recipe for mead in *De re rustica*, about 60 CE:

“Take rainwater kept for several years, and mix a sextarius of this water with a pound of honey. For a weaker mead, mix a sextarius of water with nine ounces of honey. The whole is exposed to the sun for 40 days and then left on a shelf near the fire. If you have no rain water, then boil spring water.”

There is a poem attributed to the Welsh bard Taliesin, who lived around 550 CE, called the “Song of Mead.” Another poem, *Y Gododdin*, attributed to the Welsh poet Aneirin (a contemporary of Taliesin), described the legendary drinking, feasting, and boasting of warriors in the mead hall *Din Eidyn*

(modern-day Edinburgh). In the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, the Danish warriors drank mead.

Mead (Old Irish *mid*) was a popular drink in medieval Ireland. Beekeeping was brought to Ireland around the 5th century and mead came with it. A banquet hall on the Hill of Tara was known as Tech Mid Chuarda (“house of the circling of mead”).

Lately, mead has become popular again. Some monasteries, knowing a good thing when they saw it, always kept up the traditions of mead-making as a by-product of beekeeping, especially in areas where grapes could not be grown.

### MEET

“Meet” as a noun means an organized event. As a verb, it means to touch or join, including coming into the presence or company of someone.

But “meet” as an adjective is what concerns us here, and it means “appropriate, suitable, fitting, proper, or precisely adapted to a particular situation, need, or circumstance.”

Here is a poem which perfectly illustrates the word.

The mountain sheep are sweeter,  
But the valley sheep are fatter;  
We therefore deem'd it meet  
To carry off the latter.

[Thomas Love Peacock, from *The War-song of Dinas Vawr*]

### MILLSTONE

A “millstone” is one of a pair of heavy flat disk-shaped stones that are rotated against one another to grind grain. Figuratively, the word is used to describe a heavy burden or something that hinders or handicaps. A heavy responsibility is often called “a millstone around the neck.”

The millstone is inextricably linked to human history.

Integrated into food processes since the Upper Paleolithic Age, its use remained constant until the end of the 19th century, when it was gradually replaced by a new type of metal tool. However, it can still be seen in rural domestic installations, such as in India, where 300 million women used hand mills daily to produce flour in 2002.

The earliest evidence for stones used to grind food is found in northern Australia, at the Madjedbebe rock shelter in Arnhem Land, dating back around 60,000 years. Grinding stones or grindstones, as they were called, were used by the Aboriginal peoples across the continent and islands. Different stones were adapted for grinding different things and varied according to location. One important use was for foods, in particular to grind seeds to make bread, but stones were also adapted for grinding specific types of starchy nuts, ochres for artwork, plant fibers for string, or plants for use in bush medicine, and are still used today.

Millstones were introduced to Britain by the Romans during the 1st century CE and were widely used there from the 3rd century CE onwards. Until the invention of the watermill, mills were operated by animals or people.

### **MINSTRELSY**

“Minstrelsy” is defined simply as:

- the singing and playing of a minstrel
- a body of minstrels
- a group of songs or verse

### **NUNS**

“We have been fed by the nuns, to whom the country is free.”

In the Middle Ages, women who became nuns were taking on a life-long commitment that would involve very hard work. This was particularly the case for poor women, who would often be expected to engage in manual labor, while wealthier women would be given tasks such as embroidery and spinning.



The reason there were such varied jobs in convents was due to the fact that they were mainly self-supporting communities. Nuns had very little need to venture into the outside world, and everything from food to clothes was produced within the convent garden and walls.

The fact that nunneries were self-supporting is no doubt the reason for the opinion quoted above, that for nuns, “the country is free.”

### **PALFREY**

The term “palfrey” refers to an even-tempered horse good for riding. During the Middle Ages, it was regarded as a saddle horse rather than a warhorse or a packhorse and was considered an appropriate mount for women.

Palfreys were not a specific breed, but usually the most expensive and highly bred type of riding horse, sometimes equaling the knight’s destrier in price. Consequently, it was popular with nobles, ladies, and highly ranked knights for riding, hunting, and ceremonial use. Knights would ride palfreys when journeying to battle so that their heavier warhorses would be fresh for combat.

Palfreys were among the most expensive horses because they could give a smooth and comfortable ride that would be endurable over long-distance journeys. What set palfreys apart from other horses was that rather than trot, they traveled with a lighter and more balanced step called an “amble.” As European roads improved and travelers shifted to carriages, palfreys became less desirable. But they are still valued today because of their easy amble.

### **PISMIRE**

“Pismire” is another name for the ant or emmet, a social insect living in organized colonies.

The word comes from Middle English pissemire, from pisse

(urine) and mire (ant), from the odor of formic acid characteristic of an ant hill.

In more modern times (since the 1600s) pismire has come to be supplanted by pissant, which is often used to describe somebody who irritates or annoys you.

### **PLAGUE**

“Plague” is an infectious disease. Symptoms include fever, weakness and headache. There are three forms of plague, each affecting a different part of the body and causing associated symptoms. Pneumonic plague infects the lungs, causing shortness of breath, coughing and chest pain; bubonic plague affects the lymph nodes, making them swell; and septicemic plague infects the blood and can cause tissues to turn black and die.

The bubonic and septicemic forms are generally spread by flea bites or handling an infected animal, whereas pneumonic plague is generally spread between people through the air via infectious droplets.

Plague has historically occurred in large outbreaks, with the best known being the Black Death in the 14th century, which resulted in more than 50 million deaths in Europe.

With a history like that, it’s easy to understand why the word has acquired other but related meanings:

- to cause continual distress: “plagued by ill health”
- to annoy, harass, or pester someone
- to afflict with any evil
- a disastrous evil or calamity
- an infestation: “a plague of locusts”
- an archaic expression of disgust: “A plague on you!”

Today, about 600 cases are reported a year globally. So “the plague” is still out there.

## PRYDERI

“Pryderi” is a name meaning anxiety, from Welsh *pryder* meaning “care, worry, or loss.”

Appearing in old Welsh legend in all four branches of the *Mabinogi*, Pryderi was the son of Pwyll and Rhiannon, eventually succeeding his father as the king of Dyfed. He was one of only seven warriors to return from Brân’s tragic invasion of Ireland, and later had several adventures with Manawydan. He was ultimately killed in single combat with Gwydion during the war between Dyfed and Gwynedd.

## RETINUE

A “retinue” is a group of advisers, assistants, retainers, or others accompanying a person of high position or rank.

Such retainers were not necessarily in the domestic service or otherwise normally close to the presence of their lord, but also included others who wore his livery (a kind of uniform, in distinctive colors) and claimed his protection, such as musicians and tutors.

Retinue comes via Middle English from the Anglo-French verb *retenir*, meaning “to retain or keep in one’s pay or service.” In the 14th century, such retainers typically served a noble or royal, and retinue referred to a collection of retainers—that is, the noble’s servants and companions. Nowadays, the word retinue is often used to refer to the assistants, guards, publicists, and others who accompany a high-profile individual in public. You might also hear such a collection of folks called a suite or entourage, two other words that come from French.

## RIGMAROLE

A “rigmarole” may be:

- a long, complicated and possibly pointless procedure
- a long, rambling or meaningless story
- a long list, roster, or catalogue

### SATCHEL

A “satchel” is a bag with a shoulder strap, traditionally used for carrying books. The strap is often worn so that it diagonally crosses the body, with the bag hanging on the opposite hip, rather than hanging directly down from the shoulder. The back of the satchel extends to form a flap that folds over to cover the top and fastens in the front. Unlike a briefcase, a satchel is soft-sided.

The earliest satchels were made of leather. Some sources say Roman soldiers carried rations in bags similar to satchels. Written records indicate that, around 300 CE, Scottish monks carried their bibles inside leather satchels.

The satchel has been a typical accessory of English students for centuries, as attested in Shakespeare’s famous monologue, “*All the world’s a stage.*” The traditional Oxford and Cambridge style satchel features a simple pouch with a front flap. Variations include designs with a single or double pocket on the front and sometimes a handle on the top of the bag. The classic school bag satchel often had two straps, so that it could be worn like a backpack.

Today, backpacks have become the popular way to carry schoolbooks and rations. But satchels are still popular because they are highly functional and stylish, especially when made of leather.

### SCARLET

“Scarlet” is the word which describes a vivid red color. In the Middle Ages, “scarlet” also referred to top quality cloth or clothing of this color.

Scarlet has been a color of power, wealth, and luxury since ancient times. In culture after culture, red commands the eye. We are drawn to its power and vitality. Apparently, we humans are unusually susceptible to scarlet hues. Studies show that the color quickens our pulse and breath, perhaps because we link it with birth, blood, fire, sex, and death.

But, for much of human existence, broad mastery of the color crimson was elusive. Only a few natural substances produce red dye. Henna, madder roots, brazilwood, archil lichens, and fermented stews of rancid olive oil, cow dung, and blood numbered among the sources over the centuries, but most of them fell short—fading fast into dull pinkish browns.

During the Roman Empire, red was second in prestige only to the purple worn by emperors. Roman officers wore scarlet cloaks called *paludamenta*, and persons of high rank were referred to as the *coccinati*, the people of red.

The early Christian church adopted many of the symbols of the Roman Empire, including the importance of the color scarlet. The flag of the Crusaders was a scarlet cross on a white background, with scarlet indicating blood and sacrifice. By a church edict in 1295, Cardinals of the church wore red robes, but a red closer in color to the purple of the Byzantine Emperors, a color coming from *murex*, a type of mollusk. After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, however, the imperial purple was no longer available, and Cardinals began instead to wear scarlet made from *kermes*, a red dye prepared from the dried bodies of the females of a scale insect, *Kermes ilices*, which lives on small, evergreen oaks of the Mediterranean region. The oak itself was of the genus *Quercus coccifera*, whence arose the term “*coccinati*.”

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, scarlet was the color worn by Kings, princes and the wealthy, partly because of its brightness and partly because of its high price. The exact shade, which varied widely, was not as important as the brilliance and richness of the color. The finest scarlet, called *scarlatto* or Venetian scarlet, came from Venice, where it was made from *Kermes* by a specific guild which closely guarded the formula. Cloth dyed scarlet cost as much as ten times more than cloth dyed with blue.

### **SHEW**

“Then he asked about all the accoutrements which he saw upon the men, and the horses, and the arms, and what they were for, and how they were used. And Owain shewed him all these things fully, and told him what use was made of them.”

“Shew” is an old-fashioned spelling of “show,” meaning to establish the validity of something by an example, explanation or experiment.

### **SHRIEK**

“When Lludd was king of Britain, the country was harassed by three plagues: The second plague was a shriek that came on every May eve, over every hearth in the Island of Britain. The shriek went through people’s hearts and scared them so well that the men lost their hue and their strength and the women their children, and the young men and the maidens their senses. And all the animals and trees and the earth and the waters were left barren.”

The story concerns two dragons. One dragon represented the Brythons; the other represented the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain. On May eve, the two dragons would begin to fight. The White Dragon would strive to overcome the Red Dragon, making the Red cry out a fearful shriek heard everywhere.

The plague was finally eradicated by stealth. The dragons were caught by digging a pit under the exact point where the dragons would fall down exhausted after fighting. The pit had a satin covering over it and a cauldron of mead at the bottom. The dragons fought in the air over the pit. Then, exhausted, they fell down in the form of pigs and sank into the pit. They drew the satin covering under them into the cauldron at the bottom of the pit whereupon they drank the mead and fell asleep. The dragons were then wrapped up in the satin covering and buried at Dinas Emrys.

## SLAY

To “slay” means to kill a person or animal intentionally, probably in a violent way.

Slay is an old word associated with knights and dragons. Like many words, it has some different forms. When you killed someone or something in the past, you “slew” them, as in “St. George slew the dragon.” Once accomplished, you have “slain” the dragon.

Today, to slay means to make someone laugh, or to do something spectacularly well.

## SNOWDON

“Snowdon” is a mountain in the Snowdonia region of North Wales. It has an elevation of 3,560 feet above sea level, which makes it both the highest mountain in Wales and the highest in the British Isles south of the Scottish Highlands. Snowdon is designated a national nature reserve for its rare flora and fauna, and is located within Snowdonia National Park.

In Welsh folklore, Snowdon, including Glaslyn (Welsh for ‘Blue lake’), is the site of many legends. For example, King Arthur had Bedivere throw his sword Excalibur into Glaslyn, where Arthur’s body was later placed in a boat to be carried away to Afallon. Glaslyn was also the final resting place of a water monster, known as an *afanc* (also the Welsh word for beaver), which had plagued the people of the Conwy valley.

## SOOTH

“In sooth, I know not why I am so sad.”

“Sooth” is an archaic word for truth or reality.

The best-known compounds of sooth are forsooth and soothsayer. “Forsooth” literally means “in truth” or “truly” but for the past two centuries or so has been a humorous alternative to the disbelieving “Is that so?”

“Soothsayer” is much better known. This came into English early in the fourteenth century, meaning a person who tells the truth. But within a century it had been modified to mean somebody who claims to be able to foretell the future.

### STAPLE

“Now, there was on the floor of the hall a huge staple, as large as a warrior could grasp.”

The word “staple” has several meanings as a noun:

- a principal raw material or commodity produced in a region
- a major item of trade in steady demand
- a basic dietary item, such as flour, rice, or corn
- a basic or principal element or feature: “Exercise is a staple of my life.”
- fiber of cotton, wool, or flax, graded as to length and fineness
- (medieval Europe) a town appointed as an exclusive market for a major export
- a piece of thin wire driven through sheets of paper to fasten them

As a verb:

- to grade (fibers) according to length and fineness.
- attach or secure with a staple or staples

Large metal staples dating from the 6th century BCE have been found in the masonry works of the Persian empire. These staples, which are known as “dovetail” or “swallowtail” staples, were used for tightening stones together.

But none of the definitions above explain the use of the word “staple” in the opening quote from *Peredur The Son of Evrawe*. The only clue we could find was an etymology recorded in several places: from Middle English stapel (staple, pillar, post), and from Old English stapol (post, pillar).

A warrior might grasp a post or a pillar, though the reason isn’t obvious. Perhaps the “post” was a “caber.” The caber toss is an impressive traditional Scottish athletic event in



which competitors toss a large tapered pole called a “caber.” In Scotland, the caber is usually made from a larch tree, and it can be between 16–20 feet tall and weigh 90–150 pounds.

A suitable challenge for a warrior bent on glory. But is it a “staple”?

### STAVE

A “stave” is a strong stick, especially one used as a weapon. “Many of the men had armed themselves with staves and pieces of iron.”

A “stave” is also:

- a stanza or verse of a poem
- in music, an individual group of five lines and four spaces used in staff notation
- a long strip of wood joined with others to form a barrel, bucket, or boat hull
- in furniture, any of various bars, slats, or rods, usually of wood, such as a rung of a ladder or a crosspiece bracing the legs of a chair

### STEAD

The word “stead” serves several purposes. Definitions include:

- the place or function usually occupied by another: “He’s working in my stead.”
- advantage; benefit: “His personality stands him in good stead.”
- (obsolete): locality, place
- (obsolete): a place where a person normally rests; a seat
- (obsolete): an inhabited place; a settlement, city, town
- (obsolete): an estate, a property with its grounds; a farm
- (obsolete): the frame on which a bed is laid

Derived words are: bedstead, farmstead, homestead.

### **STEEPS**

“Steeps” means a precipitous place, specifically mountain slopes or high hills. “They went forth to hunt among the steeps.”

### **STOMACHER**

A “stomacher” is a waist or underwaist or a usually heavily embroidered or jeweled separate piece for the center front of a bodice worn by men and women.

Such fabric panels that fit into the front opening of gowns and robes have been called the ancestors of the corset. Stomachers have been around at least since the 15th century, and remained a popular asset to a woman’s wardrobe well into the 18th century.

The piece was often embellished with floral embroidery, lacing and frilly bows. Other common decorations were metallic braids, sequins, and ribbons. Upper class courtesans used to decorate their stomachers with a brooch or jewel that covered the entire front, the jewel itself often known as a stomacher. Like the tiara, it was a jewel pre-eminently suited to expressing social status.

Gowns from the 17th and 18th centuries required a stomacher to close them. Stomachers were either boned to provide more support, or unboned for a rounded silhouette. If boned, the stays might be thin slices of horn.

Stomachers were meant to blend into the dress and also complement it with contrasting colors or patterns. The stomacher allowed for change in weight or pregnancy; the woman only had to change the width of her stomacher to accommodate the change in her body.

### **STRIPLING**

A “stripling” is a boy or a young man just passing from boyhood to manhood.

### SUMPTER PACK

A “sumpter pack,” is a pack animal, also known as a sumpter animal or beast of burden. It’s used by humans as a means of transporting materials on the animal’s back, in contrast to draft animals which pull loads but do not carry them.

Traditional pack animals are diverse, including camels, goats, yaks, reindeer, water buffaloes, and llamas as well as the more familiar dogs, horses, donkeys, and mules.

### SWAY

“Both he and his sway were beloved by all.”

The word “sway” now usually means to move slowly or rhythmically back and forward or from side to side. But a common archaic meaning is “rule, control, or govern.” For example, “Part of the Arctic is under Russia’s sway.”

“To hold sway” is to be master, to reign.

### THE WELSH DRAGON

The Welsh Dragon is a heraldic symbol of Wales, and one of the country’s most recognizable symbols. It is used by various institutions in the country, both public and private. The Welsh Dragon traces its history as a national symbol all the way back to the 9th century, though it is popularly believed that the symbol was already used by the ancient Celts who inhabited the country, and even by the legendary King Arthur himself.

The Welsh Dragon is known locally as Y Ddraig Goch, meaning ‘The Red Dragon’ in Welsh. The national flag features the red dragon passant which, in heraldic terms, indicates that the animal has its right paw raised.

The earliest written record in which the Welsh Dragon is used as a symbol of Wales is the *Historia Brittonum* (History of the Britons), traditionally attributed to Nennius, a Welsh monk. Approximately 35 manuscripts of the *Historia Brittonum*

survive to this day, though none from the 9th century CE, when the work was compiled. One of the stories found in the *Historia Brittonum* is about King Vortigern and how the Welsh Dragon came to be a symbol of Wales.

### THITHERWARD

“Thitherward” means toward that place, thither, on the farther or other side.

Hither, thither, and whither generally imply location, though hitherto is often temporal. All uses of thitherward(s) and hitherward(s) are locational. There is a close link between whither and thither, as seen in such pairings as “Whither I go, thither shall you go too.”

Here are some usage examples:

- I am heartily glad I came hither to you. (here, to this place)
- We have been guided by thee hitherto. (up to now, thus far)
- The British are marching hitherward. (in this direction)
- Send him thither to see. (there, to that place)
- We met him thitherward. (in that direction)
- Whither so late? (to which place)
- Whither would you have me? (to what result, for what purpose)
- Somewhither would she have thee go with her. (somewhere)

### TRAPPINGS

“Trappings” means a horse’s ornamental harness, including a caparison. It can also mean the outward signs, features, or objects associated with a particular situation, role, or thing. “I had the trappings of success.”

The word trappings originally described the decorations people attached to their horses’ bridles and saddles. The goal was to make a statement about the rider’s power and privilege. Today, we still have trappings, but they take other forms, such as expensive equipment or clothing with famous logos.

## TWAIN

The word “twain” is the archaic version of “two.”

For example, “never the twain shall meet” is used to say that two things, two places, or two people are very different and can never be brought together.

“Twain” is well-known as the pen name of author Samuel Clemens. Steamboat pilot Horace E. Bixby took Twain on as a cub pilot to teach him the river between New Orleans and St. Louis for \$500, payable out of Twain’s first wages after graduating. Twain studied the Mississippi, learning its landmarks, how to navigate its currents effectively, and how to read the river and its constantly shifting channels, reefs, submerged snags, and rocks that would “tear the life out of the strongest vessel that ever floated.” It was more than two years before he received his pilot’s license. And it also gave him his pen name from “mark twain,” the leadsman’s cry for a measured river depth of two fathoms (12 feet), which was safe water for a steamboat.

## VERILY

“Verily” means truly. It’s used to emphasize a statement or opinion.

## WEIR

“Weir” has two meanings:

- a low dam across a river to raise the level of water upstream or regulate its flow
- an enclosure of stakes set in a stream as a trap for fish

A fish weir (fishgarth or kiddle) is an obstruction placed in tidal waters, or across a river, to direct the passage of, or trap fish. Alternatively, fish weirs can be used to channel fish to a fish ladder. Weirs were traditionally built from wood or stones. The use of fishing weirs as fish traps probably dates back prior to the emergence of modern humans, and have been used by many societies around the world. In Ireland, discoveries of

fish traps associated with weirs have been dated to 8,000 years ago. Stone tidal weirs were also used everywhere.

Fishing weirs were frequently the cause of disputes between various classes of river users and tenants of neighboring land. Basket weir fish traps are shown in some medieval illustrations and surviving examples have been found. Basket weirs are about six and one-half feet long and comprise two wicker cones, one inside the other—easy for fish to get into but difficult to escape.

In September 2014 researchers from University of Victoria investigated what may turn out to be a 14,000-year-old fish weir in 120 feet of water off the coast of Haida Gwaii, British Columbia.

### WENT TO MEAT

The phrase, “went to meat,” is used in The Mabinogion tales many times, and with good reason, because it means “went for dinner.”

In that phrase, “meat” means a full meal, though more specifically, the flesh of an animal. Humans have hunted and farmed other animals for meat since prehistory. The Neolithic Revolution allowed the domestication of animals, including chickens, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, and cattle, starting around 11,000 years ago.

“Meat,” however, has other meanings:

- the edible part, as of a piece of fruit or a nut
- the essence or substance: (the meat of the editorial)
- (slang) something one enjoys or excels in: (tennis is his meat)

Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote, “Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink.” Very true. No matter how much you may love your mate, s/he is no substitute for bacon and eggs.

## WIND THY HORN

“Wind thy horn” means “blow thy horn.”

“Wind,” meaning “breath,” is used in several ways:

- the wind instruments of an orchestra
- players of wind instruments
- long-winded
- get a second wind
- to sound (a call or note) on a horn

Here’s a poem to celebrate the word:

*Wind the horn* (published 1875)

Composer: Henry Thomas Smart, Lyricist: Thomas Moore

Wind thy horn, my hunter boy,  
And leave thy lute’s inglorious sighs:  
Hunting is the hero’s joy,  
Till war his nobler game supplies.  
Hark! the hound-bells ringing sweet,  
While hunters shout, and woods repeat,  
Hilliho!

Wind again thy cheerful horn,  
Till echo, faint with answering, dies;  
Burn bright torches, burn till morn,  
And lead us where the wild boar lies!  
Hark! the cry, “He’s found, he’s found!”  
While hill and vale our shout resound,  
Hilliho!

## YONDER

The word “yonder” is an old-fashioned way to say “over there.” For example, “They headed on over yonder.”

It means more distant, but within view or at a place or in a direction known or indicated. It’s a synonym of thither, but easier to say.

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Food for Thought

(quotes from the book)

There, a knight upon a hunter foal of mighty size; and the rider was a fair-haired youth, bare-legged, and of princely mien, and a golden-hilted sword was at his side, and a robe and a surcoat of satin were upon him, and two low shoes of leather upon his feet; and around him was a scarf of blue purple, at each corner of which was a golden apple. And his horse stepped stately, and swift, and proud.

And they brought earth from Rome that it might be more healthful for the emperor to sleep, and sit, and walk upon.

A battle-axe in his hand, the forearm's length of a full-grown man from ridge to edge. It would draw blood from the wind.

How shalt thou be a knight? Thou wilt become the best fighter with the sword of any in this island. And with me shalt thou remain a space, to learn the manners and customs of different countries, and courtesy, and gentleness and noble bearing.

So she resolved, according to the arts of the books of the Fferyllt, to boil a cauldron of Inspiration and Science for her son, that his reception might be honourable because of his knowledge of the mysteries of the future state of the world.

The knife is in the meat, and the drink is in the horn, and there is revelry in Arthur's Hall.

(Let's call in the minstrels and boogie!)



The Bard's Daughter

The *Gareth & Gwen Medieval Mysteries* is a series containing, thus far, well over a dozen books published. The *Bard's Daughter* is the prequel novella.

As a bard's daughter, Gwen has spent her life traveling from castle to castle and village to village with her family, following the music. In the winter of 1141, Gwen's family is contracted to provide the entertainment for the coming-of-age celebration of a lord's son. But before the celebration can begin, Gwen's father is found over the body of his friend, with a harp string as the murder weapon and blood on his hands. With the lord of the castle uninterested in finding the true killer, it is up to Gwen to clear her father's name before her father's music is silenced ... forever.

Many of the events and people mentioned are based on historical fact.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sarah Woodbury has written more than fifty novels, all set in medieval Wales, and has sold over two million books. An anthropologist by training, her ancestry is Welsh and she is in love with the country, language, and people. She makes her home in Oregon.

NOTES ABOUT WELSH LAW:

Sarah Woodbury writes that she drew on several basic principles of Welsh law, which was one of the founding pillars of Welsh society. It was codified by a King Hywel Dda, around 950 CE.

Later on, with the arrival of the Normans, Welsh law proved to be a rallying point for the Welsh resistance against Norman rule. The Normans objected to many of the laws (paying money instead of a sentence of death for various crimes, the relatively high status given to women, the ability to divorce, etc.), but the most contentious of all were Welsh rights of inheritance. In Wales, illegitimate sons and legitimate ones were treated identically before the law, which allowed Prince Hywel of Gwynedd, Gwen's friend, (in *The Bard's Daughter*) to inherit equally with any of his father's legitimate sons.

Notable features of medieval Welsh law include the collective responsibility of kindreds for their members; the gavelkind inheritance of land among all (and only) male descendants; a status-based system of blood money (*galanas*); slavery and serfdom; the restrictions on foreigners; and very lax treatment of divorce and legitimacy which scandalized the non-native clergy.

Civil law differed from most other codes of law in the rule that on a landowner's death his land was to be shared equally between his sons, legitimate and illegitimate. This caused conflict with the church, as under canon law illegitimate children could not inherit.

Theft could be punished by death only if it was theft by stealth and the thief was caught with the goods in hand; the value of the goods stolen also had to exceed four pence. Most other offences were punished by a fine.

For the purposes of the laws, Welsh society was divided into five classes: rulers, free Welsh, Welsh serfs, foreigners resident in Wales, and slaves. The privileges, penalties, and obligations due by law varied with the social status of the person concerned.

Foreigners were considered somewhere between serfs and slaves, forbidden to offer testimony, and obliged to pledge themselves to a native Welshman (even a serf) who would be responsible for them. This status could only be removed after

three generations in the north and possibly as many as nine elsewhere, after which the foreigner's descendants were considered to be native serfs.

The position of women under Welsh law differed significantly from their Norman-English contemporaries. A marriage could be established in two basic ways. The normal way was when the woman was given to a man by her kindred; the abnormal way was when the woman eloped with a man without the consent of her kindred. In this case her kindred could compel her to return only if she was still a virgin. If the relationship lasted for seven years, she had the same entitlements as if she had been given by her kin.

A number of payments were connected with marriage. A commutation-fee was payable to the woman's lord on the loss of her virginity, whether on marriage or otherwise. A maiden-fee was a payment due to the woman from her husband on the morning after the marriage, marking her transition from virgin to married woman. Dower was the amount of the common pool of property owned by the couple which was due to the woman if the couple separated before the end of seven years. If the marriage broke up after the end of 7 years, the woman was entitled to half the common pool.

If a woman found her husband with another woman, she was entitled to a payment of half a pound the first time and a pound the second time; on the third occasion she was entitled to divorce him. If the husband had a concubine, the wife was allowed to strike her without having to pay any compensation, even if it resulted in the concubine's death. A woman could only be beaten by her husband for three things: giving away something which she was not entitled to give away, being found with another man, or wishing a blemish on her husband's beard. If he beat her for any other cause, she was entitled to a payment. If the husband found her with another man and beat her, he was not entitled to any further compensation. According to the law, women were not allowed to inherit land. However, there were exceptions, even at an early date.

Murder was regarded as an offence against the family rather than against society or the state. It was normally dealt with by the payment of blood money (*galanas*) by the killer and his extended family to the family of the deceased. The base sum was computed by the social status and position of the victim. The family of a murdered slave received no *galanas*, but the slave's owner had to be compensated for the loss. This sum might then be modified in certain situations (for example, an attack from ambush doubled the base fine). Upon the payment of the blood money, the victim's family was then legally bound to forgo its vengeance. Murder by poison, however, carried the death penalty.

Assault or offenses against honor were dealt with in a similar fashion, through a fine called "*sarhaed*." However, it only applied to the upper classes: any serf who struck a free man was liable to have the offending limb removed.

The crime of rape was treated as a theft and remedied by the payment of another fine, the payment of which restored the woman's virginity for legal purposes. A man who could not pay the fine was to have his testicles removed.

Similarly, a convicted thief would be imprisoned in the first instance, but a serf convicted for the third time was to have his hand removed. (Assuming he was not caught in the act: thieves caught with goods in hand more valuable than four pence were liable for hanging.) Such strong penalties led the Welsh to narrowly define "theft." Forcible robbery was considered much less serious. Further, a hungry man who had passed at least three towns without receiving a meal could not be punished for stealing food.

Medieval Welsh law placed a high value on compensation for any breach of the law. In particular, high and detailed compensation values were given for each limb of the body. There are nine limbs of equal value (hands, eyes, lips, feet, and nose), each of which is valued at 480 pennies. Every other limb is carefully valued and the value could be altered depending on various influencing factors.

The triad known as the Tri Arberygl Dyn (Three Dangerous wounds of man) specifies three injuries for which "He who is wounded shall have 3 pounds from him who wounds him." These are; when a man is cut so that the brains can be seen, when a man is pierced so his entrails can be seen, and when one of the four posts of the body (the limbs) are broken.

On the death of a landowner his land passed in joint tenancy to his sons, similar to the gavelkind system of Kent. Then the youngest son partitioned the land equally, and each brother took his share. Illegitimate sons were entitled to shares equal to those of legitimate sons, if they had been acknowledged by the father.

"The value of wild and tame" gives the values of various animals, for example: the value of a cat, fourpence. The value of a kitten from the night it is born until it opens its eyes, a penny, and from then until it kills mice, two pence, and after it kills mice, four pence. A guard dog, if it is killed more than nine paces from the door is not paid for. If it is killed within the nine paces, it is worth twenty-four pence.

A person accused of a crime could deny the charge by denying it on oath and finding a certain number of persons prepared to go on oath that they believed his or her own oath, a system known as compurgation. The number of persons required to swear depended on the gravity of the alleged crime; for example denying a homicide could require 300 compurgators, while if a woman accused a man of rape, the man would have to find 50 men prepared to swear to his innocence. For lesser crimes a smaller number would be sufficient.

The nature of Welsh law was such that a defendant not only had the right to a defender but also to ask questions of his accuser. Also, it was possible to appeal against a judge's decision. The consequences for a judge could be serious if his judgement was reversed, involving a financial penalty equivalent to the value of his tongue as laid down in the values of the parts of the body. He would also be banned from acting as a judge in future.

For the most part, Welsh law was in force in the parts of Wales under Welsh control until the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1282, when Norman law replaced Welsh criminal law. Welsh law continued to be used for civil cases until the annexation of Wales into England in the 16th century.

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## Interesting Words

### BARBICAN

A “barbican” was an outer defensive work (others are moats and drawbridges), which were built of stone and stood in front of the gate of a castle or bridge to help prevent invaders from gaining access to the main entryway.

In the Middle Ages, barbicans were typically connected to the city walls with a walled road called the neck. They would thus defend the entrance to the city or castle at the “choke point.” In the 15th century, with the improvement in siege tactics and artillery, barbicans lost their significance. Fortified or mock-fortified gatehouses remained a feature of ambitious French and English residences well into the 17th century.

### CACHIAD

“Cachiad” is the Welsh word for shit. It’s always handy to learn words like this. You never know when you might need to swear at somebody in a different language.

### CANTREF

In medieval Wales, for legal and administrative purposes, the country was divided into “cantrefs,” which were relatively large areas (like US counties) and “commotes,” which were smaller jurisdictions.

The word “cantref” is derived from cant (a hundred) and tref (“town” in modern Welsh, but formerly used for much smaller

settlements). A commote is a community, the word ultimately deriving from the same root as compatriot and neighbor.

The antiquity of the cantrefi is demonstrated by the fact that they often mark the boundary between dialects. Some were originally kingdoms in their own right; others may have been artificial units created later.

Cantrefi were important in the administration of Welsh law. Each cantref had its own court, which was an assembly of the uchelwyr, the main landowners of the cantref. This would be presided over by the king or his representative. Apart from the judges there would be a clerk, an usher and sometimes two professional pleaders. The cantref court dealt with crimes, the determination of boundaries, and inheritance. The commote court later took over many of the functions of the cantref court.

### **COC OEN**

“coc oen” is Welsh for a jerk or a schmuck.

### **FEOFFMENT**

In the Middle Ages, a “feoffment” or “enfeoffment” was the deed by which a person was given land in exchange for a pledge of service. This mechanism was later used to avoid restrictions on the passage of title in land by a system in which a landowner would give land to one person for the use of another. The common law of estates in land grew from this concept.

A feoffment in old England was a transfer of property that gave the new owner the right to sell the land as well as the right to pass it on to his heirs.

A medieval-style feoffment was small, rectangular, written on parchment, and had a seal. The language was Latin; English did not begin appearing until the 16th century.

### GALANAS

“Galanas” in Welsh law was a payment made by a killer and his family to the family of the victim. It is similar to *éraic* in Ireland and the Anglo-Saxon *weregild*, and was measured in cattle or money.

The compensation depended on the status of the victim, but could also be affected by the circumstances of the killing. For example, a killing from ambush or by poison meant the payment of double galanas. The payment was due from relatives as distant as the fifth cousins of the killer, with each degree of relationship paying double the rate of the next, for example first cousins of the killer paid double the sum payable by second cousins. Women paid half the rate of payment by men. The first third of the galanas falls on the homicide, his father and mother and brothers and sisters. The remainder is shared between the kindred, with two thirds falling on the father’s kindred and one third on the mother’s kindred.

The same rules applied to the receipt of galanas. In the existing texts, dating from the 13th century, one third of the sum paid was due to the Lord as the enforcing authority, but this is considered to be an innovation.

### GAVELKIND

“Gavelkind” is a system of inheritance in which a deceased person’s land is divided equally among all his sons, including those who are illegitimate. It was chiefly associated with the Celtic law in Ireland and Wales and with the legal traditions of the English county of Kent.

The word may have originated from the Old Irish phrases *Gabhaltas-cinne* or *Gavail-kinne*, meaning “family settlement.”

In medieval Wales, a legal framework had developed based on the ancient Celtic laws and traditions similar to those in Ireland. These included a custom of gavelkind inheritance known as *cyfran*. *Cyfran* was an ancient tradition passed down orally by jurists and bards until the mid-10th century, when



the laws were finally codified during the reign of Hywel Dda.

### **MILK BROTHER**

A “milk brother” or “milk sister” is a person who is not one’s biological sibling but was nursed by the same woman as oneself. It’s an ancient term for “fostering.”

Such fostering was a widely used mechanism for developing alliances in many hierarchical societies. Milk kinship used the practice of breast feeding by a wet nurse to feed a child either from the same community, or a neighboring one. This wet nurse played the strategic role in forging relations between her family and the family of the child she was nursing, as well as their community.

The practice linked two families of unequal status and created a durable and intimate bond; it brought about a social relationship that was an alternative to kinship bonds based on blood. People of different races and religions could be brought together strategically through the bonding of the milk mother and their milk ‘children.’

Milk kinship was relevant for peasants in that it secured the good will of their masters. It was also a practical way to assist families with a very ill mother or whose mother died in childbirth. This would have been helpful in many societies where, especially in times of war, if families perished, other members of society would end up co-parenting through the link of milk-kinship.

Noble offspring were often sent to milk kin fosterers that would foster them to maturity so that the children would be raised by their status subordinates. The purpose of this was of political importance to build milk kin as bodyguards.

### **SARHAED**

“Sarhaed” is both an injury, insult, or affront, and also the “wergild,” the fine paid for such damage under traditional

Welsh law, determined by the social status of the victim.

Medieval Welsh law treats many forms of insult, in many places, all of which require compensation. Welsh literature describes numerous actions that demand redress, some of which directly echo scenarios described in the laws. In effect, this depiction exemplifies aspects of feud that lie behind legal and literary descriptions of *sarhaed*. Welsh Law contains commentary on social order, hierarchy and proper behavior.

Medieval men and women took insults much more seriously than we do, and often, comments or gestures, whether unintentional or calculated, could spark a violent blood feud. Today, the term feud carries negative connotations: there is a current western cultural bias against groups who practice self-help violence associated with insult and redress, but to the participants in the feuding process, such violence functioned as a "... reasonable and eminently moral form of social action."

### SLATE MINES

The slate industry in Wales has been in operation since the Roman period, when slate was used to roof the fort at Segontium, now Caernarfon. The market for slate grew slowly in medieval days, then rapidly during the Industrial Revolution. Penrhyn and Dinorwig in Wales were the two largest slate quarries in the world, and the Oakeley mine at Blaenau Ffestiniog (in the mountains of Snowdonia) was the largest slate mine in the world. At the industry's peak, more than 4,000 men worked in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Slate is metamorphic rock and can be split into thin layers. These slates can become everything from roofing tile, electrical panels, hearths, headstones, and paving stone to memorial plaques, flooring, billiard and worktop tables, and whole buildings—and items sold in gift shops such as candle holders, wine racks, coasters and picture frames. Long ago, Welsh slate was used for blackboards and handheld writing tablets. It can be blue, purple, green or, most commonly,

several shades of grey.

Up to the end of the 18th century, slate was extracted on a small scale by groups of quarrymen who paid a royalty to the landlord, carted slate to the ports, and then shipped it to England, Ireland, and sometimes France. The slates were carried to the ports by pack-horses, and later by carts. This was sometimes done by women, the only female involvement in what was otherwise an exclusively male industry.

In the 19th century, a Welshman who quarried slate would have spent his days in an ill-lighted, cold, dirty, and dangerous space, emerging at end of day bent and white-faced, covered in slate dust and gunpowder. For this, he might earn about 12 pence a day.

The miner worked from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, with a half-day on Saturday, with Sunday and religious holidays off. If he survived death by falling rock, the mine would have been done with him at age 40 or so, since he would be coughing his lungs out from silicosis. He would buy and maintain his own tools, ropes and candles—lamps would have given better light, but oil was expensive.

Perhaps his father or brothers would work alongside him, with an 8-year-old son or nephew to make the tea. When the lad reached the age of 18, he would become an apprentice. The miner's tea break, in a cabin that he had constructed out of odd pieces of slate, lasted 15 minutes, with another 15 for "refreshment of the brain." He and his colleagues might discuss, for example, religion or the welfare of a sick colleague. Welsh was the principal language, but there were some English and Irish speakers among the workers.

The miners' workplace was an underground "chamber"—an opening in a slate deposit solidly packed with slate and supported by pillars built to separate it from the chamber next door. It would take about 15 years to work it out. A team of four men would haggle with the surveyor for a price for the chamber. Having come to an agreement, they could call

themselves rock men and the chamber theirs, and begin work. When they came to work, most likely they pushed their equipment in a hand cart. Only coal mines had the luxury of pit ponies.

They started by inserting a “jumper,” a long weighted rod, into the rock and hammering it firmly to make holes in the rock face. It would have taken these strong and fit men four hours to accomplish this.

Next, they put gunpowder into the holes; there was no such thing then as dynamite or gelignite. A fuse made of string dipped in tar and gunpowder was put into the holes, packed with newspaper, hammered in firmly with a wooden mallet, and set alight. Everybody ducked around the corner as the blast went off. It would not have been a very loud explosion, since the point was to crack and split the slate, not shatter it.

Then it was time to re-enter into the smoky, dusty chamber and break the slate into chunks. They levered the slate out with crowbars, looking for big cracks and splits to make the job easier.

Having achieved a mighty pile of slate, two of them went up to the mill on the surface to wait for the others to load the slate on the carriages and haul it up. They staked out a cutting table and made sure their name and chamber number were on it (since almost everyone was named Jones, Evans or Williams). There, the slate was split into roofing shingles, 1,000 of them per day if the men expected to earn any money.

Meanwhile, another worker, called the danger man, climbed a precarious ladder, a candle in one hand and iron bar in the other, 100 feet above the cavern floor with only a chain around his leg as a safety precaution, to check the ceiling for loose rock. He ensured that workers arriving in the morning wouldn't find a surprise dropping on them from above. A rock fall at Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1882, known as The Great Fall, buried valuable slate under 6 million tons of rock.

That was the 19th century. Slate miners no longer work underground, and their working conditions are considerably safer than of old, as compressed air has replaced gunpowder.

On 28 July 2021, the slate landscape of northwest Wales was awarded the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, while as early as 2018, Welsh slate was designated by the International Union of Geological Sciences as a Global Heritage Stone Resource.

### **WICKET GATE**

A “wicket gate,” or simply a wicket, is a pedestrian door or gate, particularly one built into a larger door or into a wall or fence.

The larger gates were often double, large and heavy, designed to allow the passage of wagons, coaches and horsemen. The purpose of wickets was to avoid the risk of having to open the main gates to the castle or city for just one or two individuals on foot. Because the wicket was only one person wide, it enabled the guards to better control access. In the Middle Ages the narrow doors in the city walls also enabled late arrivals to gain entry after the main gates had been closed.

If the small entrance in the door of a large gate has a high threshold, it may be called a manway. If it is a separate, narrow entrance next to the main gate, it may be called a pedestrian entrance. This type of double entrance is rather uncommon, however, and was only worth having at large sites where there was a lot of traffic. The narrow side entrance could be protected by its own drawbridge and sometimes even opened into a gate passage separated from the main one.

A wicket gate is also used for a stand-alone gate that provides convenient secondary access, for example to the rear of a walled park or garden. The cricket term “wicket” comes from this usage.

## **Food for Thought**

(a quote from the book)

A skilled herbalist, by definition, was the most trusted—and the most dangerous—person in any castle.



## The Book of Taliesin:

Poems of Warfare and Praise in an Enchanted Britain

This great work of Welsh literature, *The Book of Taliesin*, has been translated in full for the first time in over 100 years by two of its country's foremost poets, Gwyneth Lewis and Rowan Williams.

Taliesin (the name means “radiant brow”) is a shapeshifter, a seer, a chronicler of battles fought, by sword and with magic, between the ancient kingdoms of the British Isles. He is a bridge between old Welsh mythologies and the new Christian theology, a 6th-century Brythonic bard, and a legendary collective project spanning the centuries up to the book's compilation in 14th-century North Wales. He is, above all, no single ‘he.’

The figure of Taliesin is a mystery. But there can be no question of the variety and quality of the poems written by him or under his name, of their power and the fascinating window they offer us onto a strange and visionary world as well as into ancient history.

*The Book of Taliesin* contains a medley of poetic themes – religious, prophetic, eulogistic, historical and mythological. The Introduction has this comment: “Taliesin’s is a voice that is outrageous, arrogant, allusive, satirical, empathetic and joyful: a paradigm of bardic perspective.”

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

—The legendary Taliesin lived during the sixth century and is considered one of the greatest Welsh poets. He was a court bard for three kings, most notably King Urien of Rheged.

—Gwyneth Lewis (translator) is an award-winning poet and

was the National Poet of Wales from 2005 to 2006.

—Rowan Williams (translator) is the former Archbishop of Canterbury and currently Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge. The author of many books, he has published several poetry collections and is a contributor to the *New Statesman*.

### **HISTORICAL NOTES:**

According to the *Historia Brittonum*, Rheged appears to have been the pre-eminent small kingdom of the north (i.e. southern Scotland and northern England) in the fifth and sixth centuries CE.

The main bardic stock-in-trade was the court eulogy — praise poems to flatter and glorify their patrons. A knowledge of the historical lore was probably among the more important secondary functions of the bardic poet.

Within the intellectual culture of the Middle Ages, the Church stood center stage. The influence of the basic monastic education is apparent in many of the tales of miraculous deeds of heroes in this manuscript. The poet's self-proclaimed expertise in cosmology and biblical lore may reflect a liberal education taught by monks to the local lay population, or even the early stages of a monastic training undergone by the bardic initiates themselves. Medieval Latin textbooks were widely circulated, as were other early medieval classics.

Combining the roles of poet, propagandist, prophet and historian, the chief bard would have represented an important figure within cultural elite of native Wales, alongside the chief jurist and the tribal abbot. Each of these men represented the summit of a professional learned class. To a greater or lesser extent, the clergy, the lawmen and the bards all took to documenting their key texts in manuscript form during the Early Middle Ages.

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### **THE POETIC TRADITION:**

Poetry was of vital importance in the Middle Ages. In a hall, with an illiterate population which lacked the distractions and technology of today, every lord desired to have a court bard to help pass the long winter nights. However, that poetry was sung, not spoken.

In Celtic times, no distinct line was drawn between a druid and a bard. When Christianity arrived, however, the role of the bard changed. He became more of a poet and less a seer. A medieval document called *The Triads of Britain* details the three principle tasks of a bard:

“One is to learn and collect sciences.

The second is to teach.

The third is to make peace

And to put an end to all injury;

For to do contrary to these things

Is not usual or becoming to a Bard.”

Thus, a bard became not only a poet and musician, but a historian, a teacher, and a peacemaker.

And today, despite the best efforts of the English king, Edward, and those who followed him, the Welsh musical tradition continues with the annual National Eisteddod of Wales, which includes eight days of performances with upwards of 6000 competitors. It is the largest musical and poetry festival in Europe.

### **A COMPARISON:**

A close parallel to Taliesin's style of writing is found in the work of the mythical Irish poet, Amergin:

I am wind on sea.

I am a storm wave.

I am ocean's roar.

I am a seven-antlered stag.

I am a hawk on a cliff.

I am a dewdrop.

I am fair body.

I am a boar for valor.  
 I am a salmon in a pool.  
 I am a lake on a plain.  
 I am a word of their poetic art.  
 I am a word of skill.

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Interesting Words

AWEN

“Awen” is a Welsh, Cornish, and Breton word meaning poetic inspiration. It can also be taken to represent the spark of life, creativity, and wisdom.

On a modern Druid website, awen is described this way: “It is the deep well of inspiration that we drink from, to nurture our souls and our world and to give back in joy, in reverence, in wild abandon and in solemn ceremony.”

In Welsh mythology, awen is the inspiration of the poets, or bards; its personification, Awen, is the inspirational muse of creative artists in general.

The poem *Armes Prydain* (*The Prophecies of Britain*) begins with the phrase ‘Awen foretells ...,’ and it is repeated later in the poem. The link between poetic inspiration and divination is implicit in the description of the Awenyddion given by Gerald of Wales in the 12th century and the link between bardic expression and prophecy is a common feature of much early verse in Wales and elsewhere.

A poem in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* by an unidentified bard asks God to allow the awen to flow so that ‘inspired song from Ceridwen will shape diverse and well-crafted verse.’

LEVIATHAN

The word “leviathan” comes from Hebrew *livyathan* which means a great sea serpent. A leviathan can also describe

something that is really, really big. “The Titanic was a leviathan that now rests with leviathans.”

In theology and mythology, the leviathan is often an embodiment of chaos, threatening to eat the damned when their lives are over. Christian theologians identified the leviathan with the demon of the deadly sin envy and also used it as an image of the devil.

Leviathan has now come to refer to any sea monster, and from the early 17th century has also been used to refer to overwhelmingly powerful people or things. As a term for sea monster, it has been used of great whales in particular, for example, in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

LIMEWASH

“Limewash” is a solution of lime and water used as a substitute for paint.

Traditionally limewash was the principal finish applied externally and internally to historic buildings, quite often applied directly to the masonry or brickwork and more commonly to pre-applied lime coatings.

Limewash is one of the oldest paints known to man. The Pharaohs used it in ancient Egypt and it is still widely used throughout the world today. Recipes for making it vary. Animal fat, linseed oil, skimmed milk, or salt are often added for durability, and earth or synthetic pigments, soot, animal blood, etc., for color.

MUSTER

To “muster,” as a verb, means:

- to assemble, such as troops, for inspection or battle
- to collect, such as votes
- to enroll formally: muster into the army

“Muster,” as a noun, means:

- a collection or group: a muster of biographical facts
- a critical examination: slipshod work will never pass muster

The earliest known use of both the verb and the noun “muster” is in the Middle English period (1150—1500). Muster is a borrowing from French.

SHIELD RING

Celtic “shield rings” were a visible acknowledgement of both faith and commitment.

The Celtic warrior’s ring, like his shield, was decorated with symbols to protect him from harm. The intertwining designs represent eternity and continuity of life.

SHIELDWALL

A “shieldwall” is a protective wall of overlapping shields formed by medieval soldiers standing next to each other. It was a military formation common in ancient warfare.

The formation was used by many ancient armies including the Persians, Greeks, and the early Romans, but its origin is unknown. It may have developed independently more than once. Although little is recorded about their military tactics, Sumerian soldiers are depicted in a shieldwall formation during the third millennium BCE.

By the seventh century BC, shieldwalls in ancient Greece are well-documented. The soldiers in the shieldwall formations were called hoplites, so named for their equipment. Shields were 3 ft in diameter, sometimes covered in bronze. Instead of fighting individual battles in large skirmishes, hoplites fought as cohesive units in this tight formation with their shields pushing forward against the man in front (to use weight of numbers). The left half of the shield was designed to cover the unprotected right side of the hoplite next to them. The worst, or newest, fighters would be placed in the middle front of the formation to provide both physical and psychological security.

In the battles between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes in England, most of the Saxon army would have consisted of the inexperienced fyrd, a militia composed of free peasants. The shieldwall tactic suited such soldiers, as it did not require particular skill since it was essentially a shoving and fencing match with shields and spears.

Although the importance of cavalry in the Battle of Hastings portended the end of the shieldwall tactic, massed shieldwalls would continue to be employed right up to the end of the 12th century, especially in areas that were unsuitable for large-scale mounted warfare, such as Scandinavia, the Swiss Alps and Scotland.

TINDER

“I was tinder in fire.”

“Tinder” is a flammable substance often use as kindling for lighting fires. Tinder can be small pieces of something dry that burns easily, such as dry grass or bark, wood shavings, paper, and twigs. It was originally used for catching the spark from a flint and steel struck together for fire or light.

As indicated by the quote above, “tinder” could also be used to mean something that serves to incite or inflame. “That rhetoric was ready tinder for revolution.”

TORQUE

A “torque” (or tore) is a large rigid or stiff neck ring in metal, made either as a single piece or from strands twisted together. Most are open at the front, although some have hook and ring closures and a few have mortice and tenon locking catches to close them. Many seem designed for near-permanent wear and would have been difficult to remove.

Torques have been found in the European Iron Age from around the 8th century BCE to the 3rd century CE. For Iron Age Celts, the gold torque seems to have been a key object. It

identified the wearer, apparently usually female until the 3rd century BCE, thereafter male, as a person of high rank. Many of the finest works of ancient Celtic art are torques. Similar neck-rings are seen in various other cultures and periods.

The word comes from Latin *torquis*, from *torqueo*, “to twist,” because of the twisted shape many of the rings have. Smaller bracelets and armlets worn around the wrist or on the upper arm sometimes share very similar forms. Torques were made from single or multiple intertwined metal rods, or “ropes” of twisted wire. Most of those found are made of gold or bronze, less often silver, iron or other metals (gold, bronze, and silver survive better than other metals when buried for long periods).

WOODEN HORSE

The archaic meaning of “wooden horse” was “ship.” A ship carried people, so it made sense, perhaps, to call it a horse, since horses were then the only other entities which carried people.

A “wooden horse” was also a ridged or studded wooden device which soldiers formerly were condemned to sit astride as a military punishment.

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### Food for Thought

(a quote from the book)

So she resolved, according to the arts of the books of the Fferyllt, to boil a cauldron of Inspiration and Science for her son, that his reception might be honourable because of his knowledge of the mysteries of the future state of the world.



## Heaven in a Wild Flower

*Heaven In A Wild Flower*, by John Broughton, is the tale of an Anglo-Saxon leatherworker living on Lindisfarne and is the first book of three in the Saint Cuthbert Trilogy.

Aella is a leatherworker living in 7th century Northumbria. After surviving the war against the Picts, the king becomes his godfather, and Aella befriends Bishop Cuthbert. The monks of Lindisfarne commission Aella to make the cover of the book, the Gospel of St. John, as a gift for Cuthbert. Impressed by the masterpiece, the king sends Aella to Ireland to learn to read and write. Soon, Aella befriends a fellow student, learns to illuminate manuscripts, and falls in love. But can he achieve his dreams, and wed the love of his life?

Lindisfarne, also called Holy Island, is a tidal island off the northeast coast of England, close to the Scottish border, in Northumberland. It comprises roughly 1,000 acres and is nearly a mile from the mainland, connected by a modern causeway and an ancient pilgrims' path. Both run over sand and mudflats, which are covered with water at high tide. As of 2011, the island had a population of 180.

Lindisfarne has a recorded history from the 6th century CE; it was an important center of Celtic Christianity. The island was originally home to a monastery, destroyed during the Viking invasions but re-established as a priory following the Norman Conquest of England. Other notable sites are St Mary the Virgin parish church (originally built 635 CE and restored in 1860), Lindisfarne Castle, several lighthouses and other navigational markers, and a complex network of lime kilns.

“Anglo-Saxon” is a term used historically to describe any member of the Germanic peoples (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) who, from the 5th century CE to the time of the Norman Conquest (1066), inhabited and ruled territories that are today part of England and Wales.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

John Broughton took an honors degree in Medieval and Modern History at the University of Nottingham, where he also studied Archaeology. After his retirement in 2014, John chose the period that fascinates him most — the Anglo-Saxon period — as the setting for his first historical novel. Since then, he has had 28 novels published. Most are historical novels, but he also writes murder mysteries, fantasy and sci-fi.

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Interesting Words

BLUE MOON

Figuratively, “blue moon” means a very long time. We often say things like, “That only happens once in a blue moon.”

In astronomy, “blue moon” is a little more complicated, since it now has two meanings, and blue moons occur relatively frequently.

The monthly Blue Moon is the second full Moon in a calendar month. The period from one full moon to another is about 29 1/2 days. So, when two full moons occur in the same month, the first one is always on the first or second day of the month and the second one is on the 30th or 31st day. This happens every two to three years, but never in February. Sometimes February doesn’t have a full moon at all and this is known as a Black Moon.

The seasonal Blue Moon occurs when there are four full moons in a single season. According to NASA, a seasonal one is “the third full moon of an astronomical three-month season

that has four full moons.” Why not the fourth full moon? That would seem to be the extra one. But we could find no explanation for that.

The date of the Christian festival of Easter depended on an accurate computation of full moon dates, and important work was done on that by the monks Dionysius Exiguus and Bede, explained by the latter in *The Reckoning of Time*, written circa 725 CE. According to Bede, “Whenever it was a common year, the Anglo-Saxons gave three lunar months to each season. When an embolismic year (that is, one with 13 lunar months) occurred, they assigned the extra month to summer, with the usual three for the other seasons.”

Does the Moon ever turn blue? No. But, on rare occasions, tiny particles in the air — typically of smoke or dust — can scatter away red wavelengths of light, causing the Moon to appear blue. For example, when the Indonesian volcano Krakatoa exploded in 1883, its dust turned sunsets green and the Moon blue all around the world for the best part of two years. And moons in northeastern North America turned blue in 1951 when huge forest fires in western Canada threw smoke particles up into the sky.

BOARDS

“Father, I’ll need two thin boards for the book covers.” (The maker of the book covers also used cord, plaster, leather, thread, ivory, gold, and jewels.)

“Boards” can mean any of the following:

- long, thin, flat pieces of wood used for construction
- the wooden fence surrounding an ice hockey rink
- the stage in a theater
- the acting profession

BOLE

The primary meaning of “bole” is the main trunk of a tree. But it has other meanings, as follows:

- a reddish soft variety of clay used as a pigment
- a hearth on a hill where lead was smelted (a bole hill)
- any cylindrical shape: boles of stone
- a small boat suited for a rough sea
- a small square recess or cavity in a wall; also, a window or opening in the wall of a house, usually with a wooden shutter instead of glass.

BORAGE

“Borage” (also known as starflower) is a hardy, annual, herbaceous plant with bright blue flowers. Traditionally, borage was cultivated for culinary and medicinal uses, although today, commercial cultivation is mainly as an oilseed.

As a fresh vegetable, borage, with a cucumber-like taste, is often used in salads or as a garnish. The flower has a sweet, honey-like taste and is often used to decorate desserts and cocktails, sometimes frozen in ice cubes. The flowers produce copious nectar which is used by honeybees to make a light and delicate honey. It’s also used to flavor pickled gherkins.

Borage is traditionally used as a garnish in the Pimms Cup cocktail, but is nowadays often replaced by a long sliver of cucumber peel or by mint. It is also one of the key botanicals in Gilpin’s Westmorland Extra Dry Gin.

Borage is used in companion planting. It is said to protect or nurse legumes, tomatoes, brassicas, strawberries, and spinach

Pliny the Elder and Dioscorides said that borage was the “nepenthe” mentioned in Homer, which caused forgetfulness when taken mixed with wine.

John Gerard’s *Herball* asserts:

“Those of our time do use the flowers in salads to exhilarate and make the mind glad. There be also many things made of these used everywhere for the comfort of the heart, for the driving away of sorrow and increasing the joy of the mind. The leaves and flowers of Borage put into wine make

men and women glad and merry and drive away all sadness, dullness and melancholy, as Dioscorides and Pliny affirm. Syrup made of the flowers of Borage comfort the heart, purge melancholy and quiet the frantic and lunatic person. The leaves eaten raw engender good blood, especially in those that have been lately sick."

BYRE

A "byre" is a cow barn. A "byre-dwelling" is a farmhouse in which the living quarters are combined with the livestock and/or grain barn under the same roof. In the latter case, the building is also called a housebarn in American English.

This kind of construction is found in archaeological sites in northwestern Europe from the Bronze Age. It was also used in more modern times by Mennonites in Flanders and the Netherlands.

CEORL

"Ceorl" is an alternate spelling of "churl," a social rank in Anglo-Saxon England, the lowest class of "free" men. (See the chapter *Ivanhoe* for a full explanation.)

CHALICE

A "chalice" is a large cup or goblet, usually broad and shallow, with handles and a foot, typically used for drinking wine. The word can also be used to describe the cup-shaped calyx of a flower.

In religious practice, a chalice is often used for drinking during a ceremony or may carry a certain symbolic meaning.

CHUNTER

To "chunter" is to talk, or find fault, or grumble in a low, more or less meaningless mumble.

CLOUT

As a noun, “clout” means any of the following:

- a piece of cloth or leather, a rag
- a white cloth on a stake or frame used as a target in archery
- a kind of wrought-iron nail having a large flat head
- an iron plate used to keep wood from wearing, a washer
- to stud with nails, as a timber, or a boot sole
- a heavy blow with the hand or a hard object
- influence or power: “political clout”

As a verb, clout can be used to mean:

- to hit hard with the hand or a hard object
- to mend with a patch: “he helps the women clout their pans”

A word of Old English origin, clout was recorded as early as 700 CE. It referred commonly to metal plates which were nailed to those parts of carts, ploughs and wains that were subject to wear and tear.

CURRAGH

A “curragh” (also spelled “coracle”) is a small round boat made of wickerwork and covered with a watertight material. It’s propelled with a paddle. (See the chapter titled *Legacy: Arthurian Saga* for a fuller explanation.)

DABCHICK

The little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), commonly known as “dabchick,” is a member of the grebe family of water birds. “Dabchick” derives from “Dip Chick,” the chick that dives. And probably originated from Old English “dop” meaning to dive.

The dabchick is only slightly larger than a duckling and plump with a thin neck and small head. It has a white, fluffy tuft of feathers at the rear. Not only is it small, it is also rather shy and dives a great deal, popping up some distance away from where you first see it.

The dabchick has a most extraordinary call. It's a kind of crazy-sounding whinny, a tittering, a little like a pony, but with a laughing quality — there isn't anything quite like it. The tittering is often a duet between a pair. It begins high and goes down the scale.

DÁL

"I can see no difficulty," said the chieftain, "we can soon sort the dál."

"Dál" is an Old Irish word meaning a portion or a share. It can also mean meeting, assembly, affair, dispute, judgement, law, or distribution. In the above sentence, it refers to a dowry for the chieftain's daughter, her "portion."

Dál is sometimes followed by the name of an eponymous founder. For example, one of the peoples of early medieval Scotland, called the Dál Riata (or Dalriada), were Gaelic speakers whose territorial base was in Argyll on the West Highland coast.

DELL

A "dell" is a secluded hollow or small valley usually covered with trees.

In literature, dells are frequently imagined as secluded and pleasant safe havens. In popular culture, Rivendell is the fictional valley of Elves in J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth.

DEVILRY

"Devilry" is wicked activity or reckless mischief or black magic or dealings with the devil. Most often it means intentional bad behavior by someone who finds it funny or enjoyable.

DUBLIN

“Dublin” is the capital and largest city and major port of the Irish Republic. The name comes from the Gaelic *dubh linn* or “black pool” — where the Poddle stream met the River Liffey to form a deep pool at Dublin Castle.

The area of Dublin Bay has been inhabited by humans since prehistoric times; fish traps discovered from excavations during the construction of the Convention Centre Dublin indicate human habitation as far back as 6,000 years ago.

In 841, the Vikings established a fortified base in Dublin. The town grew into a substantial commercial center under Olaf Guthfrithson in the mid-to-late 10th century and, despite a number of attacks by the native Irish, it remained largely under Viking control until the Norman invasion of Ireland was launched from Wales in 1169.

ÉRIU (IRELAND)

In Irish mythology, “Ériu” (Modern Irish: Éire), daughter of Delbáeth and Ernmas of the Tuatha Dé Danann, was the eponymous matron goddess of Ireland. Queen of fertility, abundance and sovereignty, she is often felt to be the personification of the land itself.

The Tuatha Dé Danann, (Tribe of the Goddess Danu) was a legendary race who inhabited Ireland in ancient times. They were known for their supernatural and magical powers.

When Ireland was taken over by invaders known as the Milesians, Ériu and her two sisters, Banbha and Fodhla, stood against them. Ériu climbed to the top of the sacred hill of Uisneach, and demanded that the Land bear her name after their tribe disappeared. Her request was honored.

After the invasion, the Tuatha Dé Danann passed into the Otherworld, a supernatural realm of kingdoms below ground, where they have been the muse of many an artist and poet.

ERUDITE

To be “erudite” means being learned or scholarly. The word derives from the verb *erudire*, meaning “to instruct.” Someone who is erudite has been transformed from a rough or uninformed state to a polished and knowledgeable one through a devotion to learning.

FEATHERING

“After father died, I hoisted the runner stone and dressed it, sharpened the furrowing, and improved the feathering.”

“Feathering” has several meanings:

- the plumage of a bird or part of a bird
- a fringe of hair, as on the legs of a dog or horse
- the arrangement of feathers on an arrow
- a very light and delicate use of the violin bow
- varying the angle of propellers, rotor blades, or oars, to reduce air or water resistance
- a technique in computer graphics to smooth or blur the edges of a feature

But the word has even more specialized applications, as indicated by the sentence quoted above, which uses it in reference to maintenance of millstones.

The surface of a millstone is divided by deep grooves called “furrows” into separate flat areas called lands. Spreading away from the furrows are many smaller grooves called “feathering.” All these grooves provide a cutting edge and help to channel the ground flour out from the stones.

The furrows and lands are arranged in repeating patterns called harps. A typical millstone will have six, eight, or ten harps. The pattern of harps is repeated on the face of each stone and, when they are laid face to face, the patterns mesh in a kind of “scissoring” motion creating the cutting or grinding function of the stones. When in regular use, the grooves in the stones need to be re-cut periodically to keep the cutting surfaces sharp.

FERNS AND BRACKEN

A “fern” is a flowerless plant which has feathery or leafy fronds and reproduces by spores released from the undersides of the fronds. Ferns have specialized tissues that conduct water and nutrients.

Ferns are used for food, medicine, as biofertilizer, as ornamental plants, and for remediating contaminated soil. They have been the subject of research for their ability to remove some chemical pollutants from the atmosphere. Some fern genera can fix nitrogen and make a significant input to the nitrogen nutrition of rice paddies.

Ferns figure in folklore, for example in legends about mythical flowers or seeds. In Wicca, ferns are thought to have magical properties. For example, a dried fern can be thrown into hot coals of a fire to exorcise evil spirits, or smoke from a burning fern is thought to drive away snakes and such creatures.

“Bracken” (*Pteridium*) is a genus of big ferns. It is noted for large, highly divided leaves. It is found on all continents except Antarctica and all environments except deserts.

Bracken is one of the oldest ferns, with fossil records over 55 million years old having been found. The plant sends up large, triangular fronds from a wide-creeping underground rootstock, and may form dense thickets. The fronds can grow up to 8 feet long or longer with support.

The young, tightly coiled tender tips of the plant are called ‘fiddleheads,’ and all varieties of northern temperate zone ferns are edible. The fiddleheads should be soaked in salt water to remove bitterness and then boiled for half an hour in two changes of water. The plant has carcinogenic properties if used raw and/or long-term. Mature bracken destroys vitamin B and can cause a deadly blood condition.

When the green stems are crushed, they give off cyanide which helps prevent decay while other bio-chemicals within the fronds act as insect repellents.

Bracken fiddleheads have been eaten by many cultures throughout history, either fresh, cooked, or pickled. Both fronds and rhizomes have been used to produce beer in Siberia, and among indigenous peoples of North America. Bracken leaves are used in the Mediterranean region to filter sheep's milk, and store freshly made ricotta cheese. Rhizomes can be roasted or pit-steamed, peeled, and pounded to remove the whitish edible part from fibers. Dried rhizomes can be ground into flour.

Green bracken ferns average 25% potash and can contain as much as 55%. It has advantages over other sources of plant ash, such as hardwood. Bracken has been recognized as a source of potash since at least the 10th century CE, typically in relation to its use for soap and glass making.

In folk tales and fairy stories, it is the everyday plants that take the starring roles — endowed with magic powers, removed from the everyday world and yet well known and comforting, marvelous, and quixotic.

So it is with bracken. It was used in many ways, valued as part of the domestic economy, its usefulness keeping its spread in check.

Dried in great heaps for animal litter, for making root clamps to store carrots over winter, stuffed into packaging crates to keep cargo safe, used as a thatch, as a mulch, the ash used as a fumigant, in soap making, in glass making, and as a bleaching agent, ferns were used everywhere. The gathering of the bracken was a job done mainly by women, a hard, back-breaking job, out on the moors, pulling the bracken and binding it into great bales to carry home.

Like many plants in Celtic lore, bracken features in both paganism and Christianity. In Ireland the plant was known as the fern of God — it was claimed that a cross section of the stem cut low down, gave the sign of the cross, whereas cutting it in three places further up would spell out GOD. Thatching a house with bracken was said to deter both lightning and

witches. But in Scotland, bracken was known as the devil's footprint and was seen as a gateway to the fairy kingdom or underworld.

Bracken reproduces by spores which are invisible and are carried on the wind. This seemingly magical trick connected the plant to the powers of invisibility. The spores were thought to become visible once a year, on 23rd June and it was claimed that gathering them would give you the gift of invisibility for that night.

FLOAT

"I take this tool here, it's called a 'float,' to pare the surface (of the walrus tusk) and only then can I use a gouge and different-sized chisels to work the ivory."

As a noun, "float" means:

- something buoyant in water, such as a raft or a buoy
- a landing platform attached to a wharf
- a tool for smoothing the surface of wet plaster or concrete
- a hollow ball at the end of a lever regulating liquid level
- the air bladder of a plant or animal
- a watertight structure giving an airplane buoyancy on water
- a soft drink with ice cream floating in it
- a decorated exhibit pulled or driven in a parade
- a file with sharp ridges used for smoothing wood or other materials, such as walrus tusks

FRUCTIFY

To "fructify" means to bear fruit or become productive. The word comes from Latin *fructus*, meaning "fruit." When the word was first used in English, it literally referred to the actions of fruit-bearing plants. Later it was used to refer to making something literally or figuratively fruitful, such as soil or labor, respectively. *Fructus* also gave us the name of the sugar fructose, as well as usufruct, which refers to the legal right to enjoy the fruits or profits of something that belongs to someone else.

Fructify can also refer to a seed that grows or fructifies into a healthy plant. More generally, investing money can fructify medical research, which will in turn fructify with new cures and treatments. You could say that a company will fructify, or become fruitful, if everyone works together.

FULSOMELY

If you speak “fulsomely,” you are expressing a lot of admiration or praise for someone, but sometimes too much, in a way that sounds insincere. “He thanked her fulsomely for her help.”

The word “fulsome” means abundant, generous, full, and well developed. It can also mean excessively complimentary or flattering. Thus, the chief danger for the user of fulsome is ambiguity. Unless the context is made very clear, the reader or hearer cannot be sure whether such an expression as “fulsome praise” is a compliment or sarcasm.

In its oldest use, which dates back to the 1300s, “fulsome” meant “very full and abundant; copious.” It then came to mean “plump, shapely,” and, more figuratively, “full and well developed in sound,” as in “the singer’s fulsome voice.”

But, by the 19th century, fulsome was mostly a literary term used disapprovingly to describe excessive, insincere praise and flattery. This meaning is still current but, since the early 20th century, fulsome has been increasingly used with the older, far more positive meanings. The result is some amount of confusion: a phrase like “fulsome praise” used today without clarifying context may rightly be understood to mean either “abundant praise” or “excessive and obsequious praise.” Context is key.

GRACES

“He was a man of his word, one of his few saving graces.”

“Graces” in this context means charming or attractive traits.

In Greek & Roman mythology, the Graces were three sister goddesses, Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia, who dispensed charm and beauty.

Two idioms are in common use today:

in the bad graces of: out of favor with

in the good graces of: in favor with

GRANDSIRE

“Grandsire” is an archaic term for grandfather or forefather, or for an aged man. Oddly, it also means any of several methods of change-ringing on bells.

GREAVE

A “greave” is a piece of armor used to protect the lower leg. It’s made of metal and lined with a soft felt padding. The tibia, or shinbone, is very close to the skin, and is therefore extremely vulnerable to just about any kind of attack. Furthermore, a successful attack on the shin results in that leg being rendered useless, greatly hampering one’s ability to maneuver in any way.

“Greaves” is also the residue left after the rendering of tallow.

HAND-BINDING

“Hand-binding” or *núachrad* (more usually “handfasting”) is a traditional practice that, depending on the term’s usage, may define an unofficial wedding, a betrothal (an engagement in which a couple has formally promised to wed), or a temporary wedding (in which a couple makes an intentionally temporary marriage commitment). The phrase refers to the making fast of a pledge by the shaking or joining of hands.

Hand-binding or handfasting is an ancient Celtic tradition that dates as far back as 7000 BCE. In the ceremony, hands are tied together as a symbol of the binding of two lives.

HUE AND CRY

A “hue and cry” is a public clamor, as of protest or demand. For example, “The reformers raised a hue and cry about political corruption.” This redundant expression (hue and cry both mean “an outcry”), dating from the 1200s, originally meant “an outcry calling for the pursuit of a criminal.”

Let’s say it’s the Middle Ages in England and a villainous highwayman has just made off with your purse of gold. You can’t call the police, because in medieval England there is no organized police force and no telephone system. Instead, the job of fighting crime belongs to ordinary citizens. The first step is to raise a stink—victims of or witnesses to a crime are expected to yell something like “stop thief!” so that anyone who hears the “hue and cry” will be legally bound to join in pursuing the perfidious pilferer. These days, hue and cry more often refers to general alarm, complaint, or protest.

By a statute enacted in 1285, it was provided that anyone, either a constable or a private citizen, who witnessed a crime must make hue and cry, and keep it up against the fleeing criminal from town to town and from county to county, until the felon is apprehended and delivered to the sheriff. Those who raised a hue and cry falsely were themselves guilty of a crime.

From the late 18th century until 1839, in Britain, *Hue and Cry* was a principal or variant title for the weekly newspaper, containing details of crimes and wanted people, that afterwards became better known as the Police Gazette.

INFIRMARIAN

An “infirmarian” is a person having charge of an infirmary, especially in a monastery. The infirmarian, besides looking after the sick brethren, was also responsible for the quarterly “blood-letting” of the monks, a custom almost universal in medieval monasteries.

The infirmary was where monks went because of ill health or

advanced age. Infirmaries usually had their own chapel, dormitory, refectory, kitchen, and latrines. Some infirmaries even had their own cloister where its inhabitants could walk. The infirmary cloister garth was probably an herb garden for the pharmacy. In many ways, it was a monastery within a monastery, but on a much smaller scale.

All monks stayed there at some point, since they had regular blood-lettings and they were allowed to convalesce in the infirmary for three days afterwards. With its special diet (including meat) and a fire, it was much more comfortable than anywhere else in the monastery, so spending any time there must have made a very pleasant change. The main part of the infirmary space would have been partitioned with wood or stone to make cubicles containing only one or two beds, which would also have made a stay there desirable. The infirmarian and his staff had to be careful, though, as it wasn't unknown for monks to pretend to be ill in order to enjoy the comforts of the infirmary for a few days.

Sometimes the infirmarian was a physician, sometimes a lay physician. He would have been assisted by a staff of monks. Within the infirmary, there was a pharmacy where herbal remedies were made. It would probably have had a library, probably just a chest, of medical books.

Physicians in the Middle Ages knew, as we do, that rest is important for the sick. In most monasteries, the infirmary was built far away from the main cloister, where healthy monks walked, worked and taught, to ensure that its inhabitants could have peace and quiet.

Care of the sick was important for those following the Benedictine rule. This care extended beyond the monks themselves. In Cistercian monasteries, there was a separate infirmary for the lay brothers and many monasteries provided another infirmary for lay people living nearby, either within the monastery or just outside. St. Bartholomew's Hospital in Smithfield in England started in this way, like many other hospitals, in the twelfth century.

INTERCALARY

In broad terms, “intercalary” means “inserted between other things or parts.” But it is usually used to describe a day or a month inserted in the calendar to harmonize it with the solar year, for example, February 29 in leap years. “A leap year is an intercalary year.”

The botanical definition is “growing between the upper branches and the lower branches or bracts on a stem.”

An intercalary chapter is a chapter in a novel or novella that is relevant to the theme, but does not involve the main characters or further the plot. Intercalary chapters often take the form of vignettes that offer a broader or alternative perspective to the experiences of the main character. They can also be used to provide social and historical background that can't be easily interwoven into the narrative chapters.

KECK-HANDED

“Keck-handed” (alternative form of cack-handed) means clumsy, lacking skill with the hands. In Britain, it can also mean left-handed.

KITE

As a noun, “kite” means:

- a toy consisting of a light frame with thin material stretched over it, flown in the wind at the end of a long string
- any of various, usually small, hawks, birds of prey, which typically have a forked tail and often soar on updrafts of air
- a light sail especially a spinnaker

As a verb, to “kite” means to write or use (a check, bill, or receipt) fraudulently.

LADYBIRD

A “ladybird” is a small beetle with a domed back, typically bright red or yellow with black spots, often known as a

“ladybug.” This beetle feeds on aphids and other insect pests.

There are more than 6,000 species around the world, which are found in a variety of habitats. Their conspicuous colors and patterns, such as red with black spots, warn potential predators that they taste bad.

A “ladybird” may also be:

—the pintail duck, *Dafila acuta*: so called from its graceful form

—a lady-love; a sweetheart: often used as a term of endearment

“Ladybird, Ladybird” is the first line of an English-language nursery rhyme that relates to ladybirds, commonly viewed as lucky. The English version appeared in 1744, in *Tommy Thumb’s Pretty Songbook Vol. 2*. The verse has several popular forms, including:

Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire and your children are gone,
All except one, and her name is Ann,
And she hid under the baking pan.

LEAGUE

A “league” is an old unit of length. It was the distance a person could walk in about one hour. The Romans adopted the league and it became a common unit of measurement throughout western Europe and Latin America.

On land, the league is most commonly defined as three miles, although the length of a mile could vary from place to place as well as depending on the era. At sea, a league is three nautical miles.

LINDEN

The “linden” (also called basswood) is any of the genus *Tilia* of deciduous trees with heart-shaped leaves and drooping

clusters of yellowish, often fragrant, flowers. The tree is native throughout most of the temperate Northern Hemisphere. Lindens are often planted as ornamental and shade trees and several yield valuable timber.

In Britain and Ireland they are commonly called lime trees, although they are not related to the citrus lime.

In Europe, some linden trees have reached considerable age. A coppice of *Tilia cordata* in the Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire is estimated to be 2,000 years old.

LINEN

“Linen” is strong cloth woven from the fibers of the flax plant. The word is also used, in the plural, to describe sheets, tablecloths, and so on.

Linen is very durable and absorbent and dries faster than cotton, thus is comfortable to wear in hot weather. Linen is hypoallergenic but has a tendency to wrinkle. Flax takes significantly longer to harvest than cotton and is also more difficult to weave.

This word has given rise to a number of other terms in English, most notably “line,” from the use of a linen thread to determine a straight line. It is also related to a number of other terms, including “lining,” because linen was often used to create an inner layer for clothing, and “lingerie,” from French, which originally denoted underwear made of linen.

Linen textiles appear to be some of the oldest in the world; their history goes back many thousands of years. Dyed flax fibers found in a cave in Southeastern Europe (present-day Georgia) suggest the use of woven linen fabrics from wild flax may date back over 30,000 years. In ancient Egypt, linen was used for mummification and for burial shrouds. It was also worn as clothing on a daily basis; white linen was worn because of the extreme heat. When the tomb of the Pharaoh Ramses II, who died in 1213 BCE, was discovered in 1881,

the linen wrappings were in a state of perfect preservation after more than 3000 years.

The earliest written documentation of a linen industry comes from the Linear B tablets of Pylos, Greece. By the Middle Ages, there was a thriving trade in German flax and linen and the Lower Rhine was a center of linen making. Flax was cultivated and linen used for clothing in Ireland by the 11th century. Evidence suggests that flax may have been grown and sold in Southern England in the 12th and 13th centuries. Linen textiles, as well as wool, were produced in home weaving mills.

MADDER ROOT

Rose “madder” or dyer’s “madder” (*Rubia tinctorum*) is an herbaceous perennial plant, which can grow up to 5 feet in height. It has evergreen leaves and small, pale yellow flowers, blooming from June to August, followed by small red to black berries. The roots can be over three feet long and are the source of red dyes known as rose madder and Turkey red.

It has been used since ancient times as a red dye for leather, wool, cotton, and silk. For dye production, the roots are harvested after two years. The outer red layer gives the common variety of the dye, the inner yellow layer the refined variety. The dye is fixed to the cloth with help of a mordant, commonly alum. Madder can be fermented for dyeing as well.

The roots contain the acid ruberthyrin. By drying, fermenting, or a treatment with acids, this is changed to sugar, alizarin and purpurin. Purpurin is normally not colored, but is red when dissolved in alkaline solutions. Mixed with clay and treated with alum and ammonia, it provides a brilliant red colorant (madder lake).

Early evidence of dyeing comes from India where a piece of cotton dyed with madder has been recovered from an archaeological site dated the 3rd millennium BCE. In Viking Age levels of York, remains of both woad and madder have

been excavated. The red coats of the British Redcoats were dyed with madder; earlier and perhaps officer's fabric were being dyed with the better but more expensive cochineal.

Turkey red was a strong, very fast red dye for cotton obtained from madder root through a complicated multistep process involving "sumac and oak galls, calf's blood, sheep's dung, oil, soda, alum, and a solution of tin."

Purple dyes were also produced with madder, by combining it with indigo, or using an iron mordant.

According to *Culpeper's* herbal, the plant is "an herb of Mars" and "hath an opening quality, and afterwards to bind and strengthen." The root was recommended in the treatment of yellow jaundice, obstruction of the spleen, the melancholy humor, palsy, sciatica, and bruises. The leaves were advised for women "that have not their courses" and for the treatment of freckles and other discolorations of the skin.

Madder root may cause birth defects and miscarriages in humans if taken internally.

MANTLE

The word "mantle" has many meanings. Most usually, it's used to describe a long, loose cape-like cloak worn from the 12th to the 16th century by both sexes, although by the 19th century, it was used to describe any loose-fitting, shaped outer garment similar to a cape.

As a noun, "mantle" also means:

- a figurative cloak symbolizing authority: "the mantle of leadership"
- something that covers or enfolds: "a mantle of leaves"
- part of a mollusk or brachiopod
- the zone of the Earth between the crust and the core
- the upper back of a bird
- the outer covering of a wall
- a zone of hot gases around a flame

—in anatomy: the cerebral cortex

—a device in gas lamps consisting of a sheath of threads that gives off brilliant illumination when heated by the flame.

As a verb, “mantle” generally means to clothe in or to cover.

Is “mantle” the same as “mantel”? Yes and no. But keeping them straight is relatively simple.

Mantel in modern English largely does one job: it refers to the shelf above a fireplace. Mantle on the other hand, does many jobs, as listed above.

The two words derive from the Latin word *mantellum*, which refers both to a cloak and to a beam or stone supporting the masonry above a fireplace. The words came into use in English a couple of centuries apart, but were for a time in the past nothing more than spelling variants.

While it’s certainly simpler to use mantle in all cases, mantel is significantly more common as the choice for the shelf, which means it’s the safer choice in those cases.

MILE

The “mile,” sometimes the “international mile” or “statute mile” to distinguish it from other miles, is a British imperial unit and United States customary unit of distance; both are based on the older English unit of length equal to 5,280 English feet, or 1,760 yards.

The mile is 5,280 feet because in 1592, the English Parliament decided that each mile should be made up of eight furlongs, with each furlong being 660 feet long. This decision standardized the mile to 5,280 feet.

The modern English word mile derives from Middle English *myle* and Old English *mīl*, which derived from the Roman mile of one thousand paces.

“Mile” is also used as slang to mean a very long way or a very great amount. For example, “The second tape is miles better.” And then there’s “talking a mile a minute,” meaning great speed.

NOTHING

A “nithing” is a villain or coward who breaks a code of honor. Or, someone who’s miserly. In Norse mythology, it’s a malicious creature.

A “nithing pole” was a pole used for cursing an enemy in Germanic pagan tradition. It consisted of a long, wooden pole with a recently cut horse head at the end, and at times with the skin of the horse laid over the pole. The nithing pole was directed towards the target of the curse. The curse could be carved in runes on the pole.

OAK APPLE

“Oak apple” or “oak gall” is the common name for a large, round, vaguely apple-like gall commonly found on many species of oak. Oak apples range in size from 1 to 2 inches in diameter and may be brownish, yellowish, greenish, pinkish, or reddish.

The adult female gall wasp lays single eggs in developing leaf buds. The larvae feed on the gall tissue resulting from their secretions, which modify the oak bud into a gall. The structure protects the developing larvae until they undergo metamorphosis into adults.

Oak galls have been used in the production of ink since at least the time of the Roman Empire. From the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century, iron gall ink was the main medium used for writing in the Western world.

Gall nuts are a source of tannin in the production of iron gall ink. Tannins belong to a group of molecules known as polyphenols and can be taken from different parts of plants

such as leaves, pods, fruits, and gall nuts.

Along with gall nuts, other important ingredients in the production of iron gall ink include iron sulfate and gum arabic. The reaction between the tannins from the gall nut and the iron produces a complex that gives the iron gall ink its color. The gum arabic makes the ink more viscous and helps bind it to the writing surface.

Folklore holds that if a “worm” is found inside the gall on Michaelmas, then the year will be pleasant and unexceptional, and if a spider is found, then it will be a bad year with shortages and ruined crops. If a fly is found inside, then it will be a moderate season, and if nothing is found, then serious diseases will occur all that year.

Oak Apple Day, May 29, is a former public holiday in England that commemorated the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. The popular name refers to the event during the English Civil War when Charles hid in an oak tree. The commemoration persists in some areas today, although festivities have little to do with the Restoration.

ORPIMENT

“Orpiment” is a bright yellow mineral consisting of arsenic trisulfide, formerly used as a dye and artist’s pigment. It is found in volcanic fumaroles, low-temperature hydrothermal veins, and hot springs and may be formed through sublimation.

Orpiment takes its name from the Latin *auripigmentum* (aurum, “gold” + pigmentum, “pigment”), due to its deep yellow color. Orpiment once was widely used in artworks, medicine, and other applications. Because of its toxicity and instability, its usage has declined.

In Egypt, lumps of orpiment pigment have been found in a fourteenth-century BCE tomb. Orpiment was traded in the Roman Empire and was used as a medicine in China, even

though it is very toxic. It has been used as fly poison and to tip arrows with poison. It also has been found in the wall decorations of Tutankhamun's tomb and ancient Egyptian scrolls, and on the walls of the Taj Mahal. For centuries, orpiment was ground down and used as a pigment in painting and for sealing wax, and was even used in ancient China as a correction fluid.

PASCHAL CYCLE

The Easter (Paschal) cycle is the sequence of the seasons and days in the Christian liturgical year which are pegged to the date of Easter, either before or after it. In any given calendar year, the timing of events within the Easter cycle is dependent on the calculation of the date of Easter itself.

PESTLE AND MORTAR

The "pestle and mortar" (usually written as mortar and pestle) are the implements used to crush and grind substances into a fine paste or powder in kitchen, laboratory, and pharmacy. The mortar is a bowl. The pestle is a heavy, blunt club-shaped object. The substance, which may be wet or dry, is placed in the mortar, and the pestle is pressed and rotated on it until the desired texture is achieved.

Materials for mortars and pestles must be hard enough to resist being worn away by the crushing. The material cannot be brittle, or it will break during the pounding and grinding. It should also be smooth, so that small bits of the mortar or pestle do not mix in with the ingredients. Non-porous materials are chosen that will not absorb or trap the substances being ground.

For pharmaceutical use, the mortar and the head of the pestle are usually made of porcelain, while the pestle handle is made of wood. Other materials include stone, wood (highly absorbent), bamboo, iron, steel, brass, and basalt. Mortar and pestle sets made from the wood of old grape vines are good for grinding salt and pepper at the dinner table.

Large mortars and pestles are commonly used in developing countries to husk grain. These are usually made of wood and operated by one or more persons.

Scientists have found ancient mortars and pestles in Southwest Asia that date back to approximately 35000 BCE. These tools are mentioned in the Egyptian Ebers Papyrus of approximately 1550 BCE, the oldest preserved piece of medical literature.

Mortars are used in cooking to prepare such items as guacamole, hummus, and pesto (which derives its name from the pestle), as well as grinding spices into powder. Some Native Americans use mortars carved into the bedrock to grind acorns and other nuts.

Any tool that contributes to guacamole and hummus is the tool for us!

PICTS

“Picts” are members of an ancient people, supposedly with red hair and large limbs, inhabiting northern Scotland in Roman times. They were first noted in historical records in the late third century CE and became amalgamated with the Scots in the mid-eighth century.

They are assumed to have been descendants of northern Iron Age tribes. Pictish society was typical of many early medieval societies in northern Europe. Medieval sources report the existence of a Pictish language (now extinct), and evidence shows that it was a Celtic language related to the Brittonic spoken by Celtic Britons to the south. Pictish was gradually displaced by Middle Gaelic.

The term “Pict” is found in Roman sources from about the end of the third century CE, when it was used to describe unromanized people in northern Britain. The term is most likely to have been pejorative, emphasizing their supposed barbarism in contrast to the Britons under Roman rule. The

Picts were called Cruithni in Old Irish and Prydyn in Old Welsh.

As with most northern European people in Late Antiquity, the Picts were farmers living in small communities. Cattle and horses were an obvious sign of wealth and prestige. Sheep and pigs were kept in large numbers, and place names suggest that they moved livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, typically to lowlands in winter and highlands in summer.

The early Picts are associated with piracy and raiding along the coasts of Roman Britain. Even in the Late Middle Ages, the line between traders and pirates was unclear, so that Pictish pirates were probably merchants on other occasions.

The Picts are often said to have tattooed themselves, but evidence for this is limited. Naturalistic depictions of Pictish nobles, hunters and warriors, male and female, without obvious tattoos, are found on monumental stones. These include inscriptions in Latin and Ogham script, not all of which have been deciphered.

Pictish art is primarily associated with monumental stones, but also includes smaller objects of stone and bone, and metalwork such as brooches. Over ten heavy silver chains, some over eighteen inches long, have been found from this period; they were probably used as “choker” necklaces.

The absence of surviving written material in Pictish, discounting the enigmatic Ogham inscriptions, does not indicate a pre-literate society. The church certainly required literacy in Latin, and could not function without copyists to produce liturgical documents. Pictish iconography shows books being read and carried, and its naturalistic style gives every reason to suppose that such images were of real life. Literacy was not widespread, but among the senior clergy, and in monasteries, it would have been common enough.

PILGRIM PRIEST

A “pilgrim priest” is a priest who is on a pilgrimage, which is a journey to a holy place, after which the pilgrim returns to his or her daily life.

Several religions attach spiritual importance to particular places: the place of birth or death of founders or saints, or to the place of their “calling” or spiritual awakening, or of their connection with the divine, to locations where miracles were performed or witnessed, or locations where a deity is said to live or be “housed,” or any site that is seen to have special spiritual powers. Such sites may be commemorated with shrines or temples that devotees are encouraged to visit for their own spiritual benefit: to be healed or have questions answered.

A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim. Some research has shown that people who engage in pilgrimage walks enjoy biological, psychological, social, and spiritual therapeutic benefits.

PUFFINS

“Puffins” are any of three species of small auks in the bird genus *Fratercula*. These are seabirds that feed primarily by diving in the water after fish or zooplankton. They breed, from late April through August, in large colonies on coastal cliffs or offshore islands, nesting in crevices among rocks or in burrows in the soil. Where rabbits breed, sometimes Atlantic puffins breed in rabbit burrows. Puffins spend the winter at sea.

All puffin species have predominantly black or black and white plumage with the head having a black cap, a stocky build, orange-red feet, and large beaks that get brightly colored during the breeding season. They shed the colorful outer parts of their bills after the breeding season, leaving a smaller and duller beak. Because of their striking appearance they are also referred to as “clowns of the sea” and “sea parrots.”

Their short wings are adapted for swimming with a flying technique underwater. In the air, they beat their wings rapidly (up to 400 times per minute) in swift flight, often flying low over the ocean's surface. Although the puffins are vocal at their breeding colonies, they are silent at sea.

This species has shown some significant signs of animal intelligence. In 2020, some researchers reported that Atlantic puffins were seen using sticks as a tool to scratch themselves. Like many seabirds, the Atlantic Puffin is long-lived, averaging 30 plus years.

Puffins form long-term pair bonds. The female lays a single egg, and both parents incubate the egg and feed the chick. After fledging, the chicks spend the first few years of their lives at sea, returning to breed about five years later.

Puffins are hunted for eggs, feathers, and meat. The Atlantic puffin forms part of the national diet in Iceland, where the species does not have legal protection. Puffins are hunted by a technique called "sky fishing," which involves catching the puffins in a large net as they dive into the sea. Their meat is commonly featured on hotel menus. The fresh heart of a puffin is eaten raw as a traditional Icelandic delicacy.

Puffin chicks are known as "pufflings."

RAVENS

The common "raven" (*Corvus corax*) is a large all-black passerine bird. It is the most widely distributed of all corvids, found across the Northern Hemisphere, and has accompanied people around for centuries, following their wagons, sleds, sleighs, and hunting parties in hopes of a quick meal.

An old Scottish word, *corby* or *corbie*, akin to the French *corbeau*, has been used for both this bird and the carrion crow. Collective nouns for a group of ravens (or at least the common raven) include "unkindness" and "conspiracy."

Common ravens can live more than 23 years in the wild. They usually travel in mated pairs, although young birds may form flocks. Relationships between common ravens are often quarrelsome, yet they demonstrate considerable devotion to their families.

Some notable feats of problem-solving provide evidence that the common raven is unusually intelligent. They even use their intellect to put together cause and effect. A study in Wyoming discovered that during hunting season, the sound of a gunshot draws ravens in to investigate a presumed carcass, whereas the birds ignore sounds that are just as loud but harmless, such as an airhorn or a car door slamming.

Fifteen to 30 categories of vocalization have been recorded for this species, most of which are used for social interaction. Calls recorded include alarm calls, chase calls, and flight calls. Some calls are of an almost musical nature. Like other corvids, the common raven can mimic sounds from their environment, including human speech.

The common raven is an acrobatic flier, often doing rolls and somersaults in the air and sliding down snowy roofs. One bird was seen flying upside down for more than a half-mile. Young birds are fond of playing games with sticks, repeatedly dropping them, then diving to catch them in midair. They have been observed breaking off twigs to play with socially.

Over the centuries, the raven has been the subject of mythology, folklore, art, and literature in many cultures. In Tlingit and Haida cultures, Raven was both a trickster and creator god. Related beliefs are widespread among the peoples of Siberia and northeastern Asia.

In the British Isles, ravens were symbolic to the Celts. In Irish mythology, the goddess Morrígan alighted on the hero Cú Chulainn's shoulder in the form of a raven after his death. In Welsh mythology they were associated with the Welsh god, Brân the Blessed, whose name translates to "crow."

A legend developed that England would not fall to a foreign invader as long as there were ravens at the Tower of London; although this is often thought to be an ancient belief, the official Tower of London historian, Geoff Parnell, believes that this is actually a romantic Victorian invention.

As a trickster, ravens can cause trouble for people, too. They've been implicated in causing power outages by contaminating insulators on power lines, fouling satellite dishes at the Goldstone Deep Space Site, peeling radar absorbent material off buildings at the Chinal Lake Naval Weapons center, pecking holes in airplane wings, stealing golf balls, opening campers' tents, and raiding cars left open at parks.

Perhaps one of their sounds is a snicker.

REDSTART

The "redstart" is a small passerine bird in the genus *Phoenicurus* and often feeds like a flycatcher, making aerial sallies after passing insects, which comprise most of its food.

Redstarts are easily identified by their bright orange-red tails which they often quiver. Their name comes from the tail; "start" is an old word for "tail." Breeding males look smart, with slate grey upper parts, black faces and wings and an orange rump and chest. Females and young are browner with some chestnut tail feathers and pale bellies. Redstarts 'bob' in a very robin-like manner, but spend little time at ground level.

The redstart is a summer visitor throughout most of Europe and western Asia but winters in central Africa and Arabia. It is widespread as a breeding bird in Great Britain, particularly in upland broadleaf woodlands and hedgerow trees.

Wintering in Africa and summering in Britain. How cosmopolitan!

RETAIN

“Some churchmen retain he was a saint.”

To “retain” means to maintain, to keep possession of, continue to hold. A meaning from circa 1500 is “keep in the mind, preserve knowledge or an idea of.”

So, the writer is saying “Some churchmen retain the idea that he was a saint.”

RUBICUND

The word “rubicund” means ruddy, reddish, or flushed, especially of the face, and especially as a result of indulgence in appetites.

Which we suspect means an indulgence in good food and wine.

SCEATTA

A “sceatta” was a small, thick silver coin minted in England, Frisia, and Jutland during the Anglo-Saxon period. It is now more commonly known as an ‘early penny.’ Its name derives from Old English sceatt, meaning wealth, money, and coin. The coins were in everyday use across eastern and southern England in the early 8th century.

Sceattas carry a variety of designs showing extensive Celtic, classical, and Germanic influences. These designs include human figures, animals, birds, crosses, plants, and monsters. It appears that some may have been issued by ecclesiastical authorities, such as bishops or abbots. Minting may not have been a strictly urban or secular prerogative, and coins were used for payments and purposes beyond pure commercial buying and selling.

SCYTHE

A “scythe” is a hand tool with a long curved blade at the end of a long pole attached to which are one or two short handles.

It was, and still is, used for mowing long grass, but for centuries was employed also to harvest crops such as wheat.

In Middle English and later, the word was usually spelt *sithe* or *sythe*. However, in the 15th century some writers began to use the *sc-* spelling as they thought (wrongly) the word was related to the Latin *scindere* (meaning “to cut”).

The use of a scythe was historically called mowing, but now often called scything to distinguish it from machine mowing.

Scythes may date back as far as circa 5000 BCE. In the developed world, the scythe has been largely replaced by the motorized lawn mower and combine harvester. The Grim Reaper is often depicted carrying or wielding a scythe.

SEA THRIFT

“Sea thrift,” thrift, cliff clover, or sea pink, (*armeria maritima*) is a species of flowering plant. It is a compact evergreen perennial which grows in low clumps and sends up long stems, similar to green grass, that support globes of bright pink flowers. In some cases purple, white or red flowers also occur. It is a popular garden flower with worldwide distribution and does well in rock gardens.

Sea thrift has a modest place in herbal medicine. Historically, its dried flowers were sought for their antibiotic properties. They’ve been used to tackle obesity, nervous disorders, and urinary infections. However, it’s not all roses; sea thrift can be a skin irritant, so it’s not recommended for external use as an antibiotic poultice. The blossoms, however, are edible and can be used fresh and candied.

Often found clinging to rocky shores, this plant has become a symbol of coastal resilience. Its presence in folklore is as a guardian, guiding sailors to safety. In art and literature, it’s a motif of long enduring love and the cyclical nature of life, demonstrating its hardiness in the harshest of coastal conditions.

In the face of drought, sea thrift is a lesson in endurance. Its drought tolerance is a testament to its resilience, teaching us that beauty can not only survive but thrive under challenging conditions. It's a plant that doesn't just weather the storm; it blooms right through it.

SEAL (ANIMAL)

A "seal" is any of 32 species of web-footed aquatic mammals that live chiefly in cold seas and whose body shape, round at the middle and tapered at the ends, is adapted to swift and graceful swimming. Seals are carnivorous and live chiefly in cold regions. They come ashore to breed, give birth, and nurse their young.

Seals inhabit both the North Atlantic and the North Pacific ocean, and often ascend rivers. The largest of them — the elephant seal — can weigh more than 6,000 pounds.

Seals have been hunted for their meat, hides, oil, and fur. The pups of harp seals, for example, are born with white coats that are of value in the fur trade. The fur seals of the North Pacific Ocean and the ringed seals of the North Atlantic Ocean have also been hunted for their pelts. Elephant seals and monk seals were hunted for their blubber, which had various commercial uses. Seal hunting, or sealing, was so widespread and indiscriminate in the 19th century that many species might have become extinct if international regulations had not been enacted for their protection. The severe decline of sealing after World War II and the effects of international agreements aimed at conserving breeding stocks enabled several severely depleted species to replenish their numbers.

Though especially abundant in polar seas, seals are found throughout the world, with some species favoring the open ocean. Seals cannot swim as fast as dolphins or whales but are more agile in the water. The main predators of seals are killer whales, polar bears, leopard seals, large sharks, and human beings.

Mythologies from various areas of the world (mostly in the North) feature seals called “selkies.” Selkies, sometimes called “selkie folk,” are mythological creatures that can shapeshift between seal and human forms by removing or putting on their seal skin. The term “selkie” derives from the Scots word for “seal.”

Selkies have a dual nature: they can be friendly and helpful to humans, but they can also be dangerous and vengeful. Selkies are often depicted as attractive and seductive in human form, and many stories involve selkies having romantic or sexual relationships with humans, sometimes resulting in children. Selkies can also be coerced or tricked into marrying humans, but such marriages are often unhappy. The selkies always long for the sea and may eventually escape if they find their skins.

A typical folk-tale is that of a man who steals a female selkie's skin, finds her naked on the sea shore, and compels her to become his wife. She may bear several children by her human husband, but once she discovers her skin, she will immediately return to the sea and abandon the children she loved.

Male selkies are described as being very handsome in their human form, and having great seductive powers over human women. They typically seek those who are dissatisfied with their lives, such as married women waiting for their fishermen husbands.

In David Thomson's book *The People of the Sea*, which chronicles the extensive legends surrounding the grey seal within the folklore of rural Scottish and Irish communities, it is the children of male selkies and human women that have webbed toes and fingers. When the webbing is cut, a rough and rigid growth takes its place. Before the advent of modern medicine, when children were born with abnormalities, it was common to blame the fairies.

It was only during hard times that the people of the Scottish Isles would kill seals to make use of their skin and blubber. It

was thought that the killing of a seal would result in misfortune for the perpetrator.

Scottish folklorist and antiquarian David MacRitchie believed that early settlers in Scotland probably encountered, and even married, Finnish and Sami women who were misidentified as selkies because of their sealskin kayaks and clothing. Others have suggested that the traditions concerning the selkies may have been due to misinterpreted sightings of Finn-men (Inuit from the Davis Strait). The Inuit wore clothes and used kayaks that were both made of animal skins. The clothes and kayaks would lose buoyancy when saturated and would need to be dried out. It is thought that sightings of Inuit divesting themselves of their clothing or lying next to the skins on the rocks could have led to the belief in their ability to change from a seal to a man.

SEAX

“His hand went to the hilt of his seax.”

A “seax” is a small, curved one-edged sword, fighting knife, or dagger typical of the Germanic and Celtic peoples of the Early Middle Ages, especially the Saxons. The name comes from an Old English word for “knife.”

Often called a “Viking knife,” the shape and construction of seaxes had a great deal of variation. Some had braided bands or snakes engraved in the blade, and frequently included metal bolsters and pommels. Both the edge and the back were curved towards the tip, which was generally located above the centerline of the blade. Some had simpler decorations on the blade, such as parallel lines. None had crossguards and many were often simply made, with hilts of wood, bone, or horn and simple fittings.

The Viking seax was usually carried in a sheath, or scabbard, that hung at a slight angle, horizontally from a belt. This angle, small though it was, did prevent the seax from sliding accidentally out of the scabbard. It was carried mostly sharp

edge up, so that the blade wouldn't cut through the scabbard.

In peacetime, the Viking seax was as an everyday machete-like tool that was useful in the forest, wood working, farm-work, hunting, skinning wild animals, and preparation of food. In a time of conflict or war, the Viking seax was a rugged and deadly weapon that served well in combat and on the battlefield. According to the Icelandic Sagas, some Vikings even preferred the seax over a sword for fighting.

STOAT

The “stoat,” or “ermine,” is a small carnivorous mammal of the weasel family (and is very much like a weasel in size and shape) which has chestnut fur with white underparts and a black-tipped tail. It is native to both Eurasia and North America and, in northern areas, the coat turns white in winter.

The name “ermine” is used for the stoat in its pure white winter coat, or for its fur. Ermine fur was used in the 15th century by Catholic monarchs. It has long been used on the ceremonial robes of members of the United Kingdom House of Lords.

Stoats eat rodents, rabbits, hamsters, birds, fish, and amphibians. The animal does not dig its own burrows, instead using the burrows of the rodents it kills. The skins and underfur of rodent prey are used to line the nest chamber. The stoat also inhabits old and rotting stumps, under tree roots, in heaps of brushwood, haystacks, in bog hummocks, in the cracks of vacant mud buildings, in rock piles, rock clefts, and even in magpie nests. Each stoat has several dens dispersed within its range.

In Irish mythology, stoats were viewed anthropomorphically as animals with families, which held rituals for their dead. They were also viewed as noxious animals prone to thieving, and their saliva was said to be able to poison a grown man. To encounter a stoat when setting out for any journey was

considered bad luck, but one could avert this by greeting the stoat as a neighbor. These animals were also supposed to hold the souls of infants who died before baptism.

The stoat was introduced into New Zealand in the late 19th century to control rabbits, but had a devastating effect on native bird populations and was nominated as one of the world's top 100 "worst invaders."

TORMENTIL

"Tormentil" (erect cinquefoil) is a common, low-growing and creeping perennial of acid grassland, heathland and moorland, but can also be found on roadside verges. It has deeply toothed leaves with three lobes and silvery undersides. The four-petalled, yellow flowers, a rich source of nectar, appear May to September. It is seen throughout Europe and has been introduced to eastern North America.

This plant is considered to be one of the safest astringents, and is widely used in herbal medicine in the treatment of diarrhea, dysentery, and sore throats. The roots are extremely rich in tannin, and they yield a red dye, which is still used as an ingredient in the manufacture of artists' colors.

TÚATH

"Túath" (plural túatha) is the Old Irish term for the basic political and jurisdictional unit of Gaelic Ireland.

In the distant past, the term "túath" meant a clan or tribal family. In later times it came to mean the ancestral lands of a tribe or tribal grouping. The túath could be described as the smallest unit of land over which a local clan chief exercised control. In terms of size, its closest parallel is the parish and, in fact, sometimes the boundaries of these two divisions coincided. On occasion, however, the túath was divided into two parishes.

In ancient Irish terms, a household was reckoned at about 30

people per dwelling. A *trícha cét* (“thirty hundreds”), was an area comprising 100 dwellings or, roughly, 3,000 people. A *túath* consisted of a number of allied *trícha céta*, and therefore referred to no fewer than 6,000 people. Probably a more accurate number would be around 9,000 people.

Each *túath* was a self-contained unit, with its own executive, assembly, courts system and defense force. *Túatha* were grouped together into confederations for mutual defense. The organization of *túatha* is covered to a great extent within the Brehon laws, Irish laws written down in the 7th century, also known as the *Fénechas*.

In Modern Irish it is spelled *tuath*, without the accent, and usually refers to “rural districts” but the historical meaning is still understood and employed, as well.

The *Tuatha Dé Danann* (meaning “the folk of the goddess Danu”), also known by the earlier name *Tuath Dé* (“tribe of the gods”), are a supernatural race in Irish mythology. Many of them are thought to represent deities of pre-Christian Gaelic Ireland.

VAINGLORY

“Vainglory” is excessive or ostentatious pride especially in one’s achievements. So the two halves of the word “vainglory” pretty much define it.

Vainglory is a quality possessed by people who are conceited, boastful, and have an overly high opinion of themselves. It is the opposite of humility.

VINEGAR

“He washed it thoroughly with vinegar, which stung like devil’s spittle.”

“Vinegar” is a sour-tasting liquid containing acetic acid, obtained by fermenting dilute alcoholic liquids, typically wine,

cider, or beer. It can also be used to describe sourness or peevishness of behavior, character, or speech.

The first documented evidence of vinegar making was by the ancient Babylonians around 3000 BCE. They primarily made vinegar from dates, figs, and beer and used it for both culinary and medicinal purposes. The Greeks and Romans frequently used vinegar made from wine. In the late Middle Ages, the commercial making of malt vinegar began to develop in England, where it was first known as *alegar*, and balsamic vinegar was evolving in Italy,

Vinegar is used in food preparation, a household cleaning agent, and a weed-killer. But it has also been used in inks for hundreds of years. It's a "mordant" or "fixative" which helps the dye bind to paper or fabric.

(See the article on "oak apple" above, for a description of iron gall ink.)

WELD

"Weld" (*reseda luteola*), a flowering plant species, was the most widely used source of natural dye. Other common names include dyer's rocket, dyer's weed, woold, and yellow weed. A native of Europe and Western Asia, the plant can be found in North America as an introduced species. The plant is rich in luteolin, a flavonoid which produces a bright yellow dye. The yellow could be mixed with the blue from woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) to produce greens such as Lincoln green.

Weld grows on waste ground usually up to 5 feet high. Long narrow sinuous stems, which are normally highly contorted, are covered in a long inflorescence over most of their upper length. The lower length is covered in long narrow leaves.

The dye was in use by the first millennium BCE, perhaps earlier than either woad or madder. Dye from weld serves well for linen, wool, and silk dyeing, with proper management, all shades of yellow, and producing a bright and beautiful color.

Weld is a primary dye for the wool tapestries at the Ramses Wissa Wassef Art Centre in Giza, Egypt. Each February, the plant is harvested for the annual wool dyeing event among all the artists at the center.

WHEELWRIGHT

A “wheelwright” builds or repairs wooden wheels. The “wright” part of the word means a worker or shaper of wood, as in shipwright and arkwright. This occupational name became the English surname Wright. It also appears in surnames like Cartwright and Wainwright. This corresponds with skillful metal workers being called Smith.

Early wooden wheels were solid, made from slabs of trees. They were heavy but the simple construction did not require much skill. Wheels with spokes were lighter. They could be constructed with smaller trees and built larger in diameter because they were not limited by the size of trees in the region. However, spoked wheels required precise spacing and careful calculations to construct a perfect circle. The special craft of wheelwright probably started with the invention of the spoke.

These tradesmen made wheels for carts, wagons, coaches, the belt drives of steam powered machinery, and spinning wheels. Most were made from wood, but other materials have been used, such as bone and horn, for decorative or other purposes.

WOAD

“Woad” (*Isatis tinctoria*) is a European plant formerly cultivated for its leaves, which yield a blue dye.

Since ancient times, woad was an important source of blue dye and cultivated throughout Europe. In medieval times, there were important woad-growing regions in England, Germany and France. Grown in Europe since the Stone Age, it has a long association with East Anglia, notably with Boudicca and the Iceni tribe who used woad to color their faces before going

into battle. Further north the Picts also gained notoriety for their body painting with the blue woad dye.

Woad was eventually replaced by the more colorfast *Indigofera tinctoria* and, in the early 20th century, both woad and *Indigofera tinctoria* were replaced by synthetic blue dyes. There has been some revival of the use of woad for craft purposes.

The traditional processing of woad started with it being grown as a field crop and picked in its first year. The leaves were chopped up into a paste by a horse driven mill and then made into balls by hand. These were left to dry in special drying sheds for about four weeks until they became hard like wood.

The dried balls were broken up into a powder, sprinkled with water and allowed to ferment. This was known as couching. When the couched woad was dry, it was packed into barrels ready for the dyer. The dyer poured hot water onto the couched woad in the vat, and added potash or urine. This mixture would ferment for three days before the dyebath was ready. The cloth was wetted before being immersed into the vat.

Woad balls were very valuable and were used for trading. In the mid-1580s woad-growing was restricted by the government as grain supplies were beginning to be threatened by woad over-production, which was six times more valuable at that time. Elizabeth I overturned this restriction in 1601 but would not allow any processing near her palaces because of its offensive smell.

Woad was one of the three staples of the European dyeing industry, along with weld (yellow) and madder (red), though it is the dark blue of the woad that has lasted best.

In Erfurt, the woad-traders provided the funds to found the University of Erfurt. Traditional fabric is still printed with woad in Thuringia, Saxony and Lusatia today.

WOLFSBANE

The plant “wolfsbane” belongs to a genus of highly poisonous perennials known as monkshood or aconite (or leopard’s bane, devil’s helmet, and blue rocket). They naturally grow in mountainous areas across the northern half of the globe and are also planted in gardens for their deep purple blooms, which continue flowering long after other perennials fade for the season. Ancient Greeks hunted wolves by poisoning their bait with this plant, which led to the common name of wolfsbane. It is sometimes called monkshood because of the shape of its upper sepal.

Wolfsbane is not only beautiful and poisonous, it also has a colorful history associated with werewolves, vampires, and witches.

In Greek myth, wolfsbane originated from the toxic slobber of a three-headed dog named Cerberus, the scary guardian of the gates of Hell. In the Dark Ages, wolfsbane was said to be used by witches in spells and potions and was one of several ingredients for an ointment that, when applied to a broom, could facilitate flight. Stories also proclaimed that a sorceress who carried wolfsbane seeds wrapped in lizard skin could become invisible.

In the Middle Ages, wolves and werewolves were a genuine fear in Europe. Frightened folks turned to growing wolfsbane for their protection, as superstitions said that werewolves could be repelled by the plant, or even tamed by it. Others, however, believed that having contact with wolfsbane on a full moon could actually cause shape-shifting. Patients who suffered from lycanthropy (the delusion of being a wolf) were prescribed regular—and often lethal—doses of wolfsbane by their medieval doctors.

Which was more dangerous — the wolfsbane or the medic?

WYRD

“Wyrd” is a concept in Anglo-Saxon culture corresponding to fate or personal destiny, or “that which comes to pass.” The word is ancestral to Modern English “weird,” whose meaning today is “supernatural” or “uncanny,” or simply “odd.”

Wyrd is Fate or Destiny, but not the “inexorable fate” of the ancient Greeks. A “happening, event, or occurrence” is closer to the way our Anglo-Saxon and Norse forbears considered this term. In other words, wyrd is not an end-point, but something continually happening around us at all times.

The implication is that while a man’s courage holds out, he has a hope of winning through since wyrd or ‘the way things happen’ will often work to help such a man, as long as he is not doomed. Conversely, if a man is doomed then not even his courage can help him stand against ‘the course of events.’

Just as the traveler affects the outcome of his journey by the path he chooses, so do we play an active role in facing what wyrd metes out to us. What you do as an individual can bend or change wyrd.

The modern English usage actually developed from Scots, in which, beginning in the 14th century, “to weird” was used as a verb with the sense of “to preordain by decree of fate.” This use then gave rise to the nineteenth century adjective meaning “unearthly,” which then developed into modern English “weird.”

Wyrd, before it became weird, did carry connotations of the supernatural, as in Shakespeare’s weird sisters, the trio of witches in *MacBeth*. The original Wyrd Sisters were of course, the three Norns, the Norse Goddesses of destiny.

The analogy of a spider web is usefully employed in considering wyrd. Each section of the web is a discreet part of the whole, yet the tiniest ensnared insect will set the entire web vibrating. Whether the spider wins her dinner depends on how skillfully she has woven her web, how quickly she reacts, and

the chances of the captured insect to struggle free. The web is wyrd, but what the actors do upon it will decide the outcome.

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## **Food for Thought**

(quotes from the book)

“In the name of Woden ...”

In German mythology, the chief deity is Woden, identified with the Norse Odin, who is “lord of frenzy.”

“I spat on my palm and clasped that of the mason and the pact was sealed.”

“By Thunor ...”

Thunor is an old English deity identified with Thor and associated with Jupiter.

“In my experience, kings are to be avoided.”

“There’s a saying often repeated in these parts: things come in threes.”



## The Douglas Bastard

*The Douglas Bastard*, subtitled *Archibald the Grim*, is a historical novel of Scotland, featuring Archibald Douglas as the main character.

*Wikipedia* says that Archibald Douglas, Earl of Douglas and Wigtown, Lord of Galloway, Douglas and Bothwell (c. 1330 – 1400), called Archibald the Grim or Black Archibald, was a late medieval Scottish nobleman. Archibald was the bastard son of Sir James “the Black” Douglas, Robert I’s trusted lieutenant.

This story takes place between the years 1338 and 1346 and deals with Archibald Douglas and the bloody Second Scottish War of Independence. King Robert the Bruce and the Black Douglas are dead, and Scots once more must fight for their freedom. Young Archibald returns from exile to a Scotland ravaged by war. With treachery and danger on every side, he must learn to sleep with a claymore in his hand.

The author, J. R. Tomlin, has written twenty historical novels. In love with Scotland and its history, she has spent much time there and obviously does a lot of research.

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Below are three lists of interesting words from the book. The first contains Scottish words and their English meanings. The second consists of old words and their definitions, but which have no interesting history. The third is comprised of medieval words which have engaging stories.

## Scottish Words

- afeart** — afraid  
**anent** — regarding, about  
**anyroad** — anyway  
**bairn** — baby or young child  
**bannock** — unleavened oat flatbread, cooked on a griddle  
**brae** — hillside or sloping bank  
**braw** — fine (It was a braw day.)  
**burgh** — an autonomous chartered town  
**burgher** — citizen of a town or city, typically a merchant  
**burn** — small stream, brook  
**cannae** — cannot  
**dinnae** — do not  
**forbye** — besides, in addition  
**good-son** — son-in-law  
**hell mend ye** — a curse for someone who won't listen  
**ken** — know  
**kent** — knew; past tense of "ken"  
**kist** — a strong box for storage or shipping, a money chest  
**love-bairn** — a child born out of wedlock  
**och** — exclamation of surprise, confirmation, or disagreement  
**sassenach** — derogatory term for an Englishman  
**siller** — silver, usually coins or money  
**skelp** — a blow, slap, or smack  
**tattie** — potato, stupid person  
**tolbooth** — main municipal building of a medieval burgh  
**unco** — very, extremely, strange or unfamiliar  
**willnae** — will not  
**yon** — yonder, that or those, over there

## Words With No Stories

- au outrage** — a French phrase meaning to the utmost  
**aventail** — detachable mail hung from a helmet to protect the neck and shoulders  
**bide** — to remain or stay somewhere: "I shall bide at home."  
**chaffinch** — a small European finch  
**checky** — in heraldry checkered, like a checkerboard

**ecu** — an old French unit of value

**enarmes** — the straps by which a shield was held on the arm

**fess** — in heraldry, a band on a coat of arms crossing the shield center horizontally

**gambeson** — padded cloth jacket worn under armor

**good weal** — the public good, the good of society

**gorse** — a tall, hardy, wild bush with sharp thorns and small, yellow flowers

**harling** — a rough wall finish of lime and aggregate

**hie** — go quickly, hasten

**meinie** — feudal retainers or attendants; a crowd; throng

**peel** — a small fortified tower on the Scottish-English border

**prebend** — a stipend paid by a cathedral to a clergyman

**recet** — a haven; the tent where jousts retired to rest or prepare for a bout

**sabaton** — foot covering in mail or plate, (from Old French *sabot* “wooden shoe”)

**scrip** — a small bag or wallet generally tied to the belt

**sumpter** — a pack animal; the driver of a packhorse; a pack or burden

**undercroft** — a vault or chamber underground

## Medieval Word Histories

### BAILEY

A “bailey” is the sturdy, defensive wall, usually built of stone, around a castle and is meant to keep invaders out. The “bailey yard” is the courtyard between the bailey wall and the main structure of the castle. The word comes from Old French *bail*, meaning stake, palisade, or brace.

### BASCINET

A “bascinet” was a Medieval European open-faced, light combat helmet. It evolved from a type of iron or steel skullcap (*cervelliere*) worn as a helm, but extended downwards at the rear and sides to protect the neck. A mail curtain (*aventail* or *camail*) was usually attached to the lower edge of the helmet

to provide more protection for the throat, neck and shoulders. A visor (face guard) was sometimes employed to protect the exposed face.

### **BOGLE**

A bogle is a phantom or goblin or scarecrow. One popular story of a bogle talks about Tatty Bogle, depicted as a scarecrow, who would hide himself in potato fields (hence his name) and attack unwary humans or cause blight within the patch. Another popular Scottish reference is in *The Bogle by the Boor Tree*, a Scots poem wherein the bogle is heard in the wind and in the trees and “frichts wee weans” (frightens small children).

### **CAPUT**

“Caput” is the Latin word for “head,” leading to our phrase “per capita,” which means equal shares, or share and share alike. But it could also mean chief person or capital city.

A derivation, “caput lupinum” (wolf’s head) is a term used in the English legal system. This term was used in Medieval England to designate a person pronounced by the authorities to be a dangerous criminal, who could thus be killed without penalty.

### **CHAUSSES**

Chausses (from French) was a Medieval term for leggings. The term also meant close-fitting leg armor, routinely made of mail. They generally extended well above the knee, covering most of the leg. Chausses offered flexible protection that was effective against slashing weapons. However, the wearer still felt the full force of crushing blows.

### **COG**

The word “cog” has several meanings when used as a noun: —one of a series of teeth, as on the rim of a wheel or gear.

—a person or thing playing a small part in a large organization or process.

—in carpentry, a projection or tenon at the end of a beam designed to fit into a matching opening of another piece of wood, meant to form a joint.

—in mining, one of the rough pillars of stone or coal left to support the roof of a mine.

—in history, a clinker-built, flat-bottomed, square-rigged medieval ship with a round, bulky hull and a single mast. It might also mean a small fishing boat.

—a trick or deception, a falsehood

As a verb, cog can mean:

—to load (a die) so that it can be used to cheat

—to cheat; to play or gamble fraudulently

—to seduce by adulation, artifice, or falsehood; to wheedle

—to plagiarize

### COTEHARDIE

A “cotehardie”(also called a kirtle, see below) was a long-sleeved medieval garment usually thigh-length and belted for men, but full-length for women. It was made to fit closely, often by buttons or lacing. Literally, the word means “bold tunic.” A hardy coat, perhaps?

The garments were usually dyed a single color. The wealthiest people might wear some embroidery or fringe on the hem of their cote.

A woman’s cotehardie could be dramatic. The snugly-fitting bodice and sleeves were attached to a long, very wide skirt that might have many folds. The skirt began just below the woman’s breasts, and its bulk gave the wearer the pregnant profile that is often seen in paintings and tapestries from the period. Some cotehardie skirts had slits cut in them, and the woman gathered up the front part of the skirt and carried it before her. It was also a custom for women to cut off the sleeves of their cotehardies to give as a prize to a favored knight in a jousting tournament.



Somewhat like teenagers throwing their panties onstage at a Beatles concert?

### CRENEL

A “crenel” is the open space between two merlons (see below) in a battlement or crenelated wall, and through which soldiers shot or fired missiles.

### CUIRASS

A “cuirass” is a piece of armor, usually made of leather or metal, consisting of breastplate and backplate fastened together. The word can also be used to describe the protective armor of a ship or any animal’s carapace.

In Greek and Roman times, the musculature of the male torso was idealized in the form of the “muscle” or “heroic” cuirass, sometimes with added symbolic representations in relief. Cuirasses and corsets of bronze, iron, or similar substances were used as part of their military equipment.

Cuirasses continued in use longer than any other single piece of armor. The British, French, German, and Russian heavy cavalry wore cuirasses as part of their parade uniforms leading up to World War I. Although in the early part of the conflict, the French still wore their cuirasses into battle, for the most part they were covered with a canvas cloth for protection against the weather and for reducing visibility to the enemy. All other militaries have taken them out of combat use.

For parade purposes, the Prussian Gardes du Corps and other corps wore cuirasses of richly decorated leather. The Pontifical Swiss Guard soldiers still wear cuirasses for swearing-in ceremonies, and at Christmas and Easter.

## CURLEW

A “curlew” is a large wading bird of the sandpiper family, with long legs, a long down-curved bill, brown mottled plumage, and frequently a distinctive ascending two-note call.

## FAULD

The word “fauld” can be one of three things.

- a piece of armor attached to the bottom of the breastplate, designed to protect the midriff and hips
- the tympanum arch of a blast furnace
- a halo round the moon, as a presage of stormy weather

## FLUX

“Flux” is another old word that has survived into the present with several meanings. The basic definition is “something that constantly changes.” For example, “Our plans are in a state of flux at the moment.”

More specific meanings are:

- a flowing of fluid from the body, such as diarrhea
- a continuous moving on or passing by (as of a stream)
- a continued flow (a flux of words)
- to make or become fluid
- to treat with a flux
- a substance used to promote fusion (of metals or minerals)
- in physics, the rate of transfer of fluid, particles, or energy across a given surface
- in philosophy, the state of constant change in which all things exist
- historically, rheumatism, which was thought to be caused by an excessive flow of rheum or fluid into a joint

## GUIGE

A “guige” is a long strap, typically made of leather, used to hang a shield on the shoulder or neck when not in use. In combat, it allowed the use of a two-handed weapon without discarding the shield.

## HOBELAR

“Hobelars” were light cavalry, or mounted infantrymen, used in Western Europe during the Middle Ages for skirmishing. They originated in 13th century Ireland, and generally rode “hobbies,” a light but agile horse.

Hobelars were highly mobile and excelled in patrols, scouting, and reconnaissance, so were eminently suited to the terrain in which military operations had to be conducted in Ireland. However superior the Norman knight might be upon the field of battle, the bogs and woods of Ireland gave little opportunity for the mail-clad charge.

Hobelars were used successfully by both sides during the Wars of Scottish Independence. There is no surviving description of the equipment of the original Irish hobelar. The pony itself was unarmored, and ridden in the Irish style: no saddle, no bridle, no stirrups.

## HOBBIES

The native Irish horse, the “hobby,” (also called “hobbler”) was small, active, and trained to cross the most difficult and boggy country.

The name arises from the word *hobin*, a French word thought to be derived from the Gaelic term *obann*, meaning “swift.” Though small, the hobby was of good quality. It is represented today by the Connemara pony.

And, from the Irish hobby comes our more modern word, a “hobby-horse,” which is a child’s toy horse. It’s a simple straight stick with a small horse’s head (of wood or stuffed fabric), and perhaps reins, attached to one end. This toy was also sometimes known as a cock horse (as in the nursery rhyme *Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross*) or stick horse. Larger hobby horses feature in some traditional seasonal customs, such as Mummers Plays and the Morris dance in England.

Now we have another evolution of the term, “to ride one’s hobby-horse,” meaning to follow a favorite pastime, such as doing jigsaw puzzles or wood-turning, or to keep talking about some particular obsession.

### HODDEN GREY

“Hodden grey” is a thick, coarse, undyed cloth made of undyed wool, formerly much worn by the peasantry of Scotland from prehistory. This material was suitable for outdoor use: warm, windproof, and water-resistant.

Spinning and weaving wool for clothes, blankets, rugs, etc. was just part of the daily domestic routine, usually done on small hand-loom by the peasants. For the hodden grey fabric, they mixed black and white fleeces together in the proportion of one black to twelve white when weaving. Thus the cloth was originally a light grey, but over time shades of brown and purple were introduced. Still called “hodden grey,” it became the inspiration for the khaki color now used by militaries world wide.

Hodden was common to all clans. It was a symbol of class and status. Gaelic custom dating back into prehistory required the Celtic peasant class to wear undyed clothing. The ancient proto-Celtic culture was very status-conscious.

This custom of associating low status with the colors grey and white is referred to in the Laws of the Four Burghs in the reign of King David I (1124 – 1153). One law was that a man forced by poverty to dispose of his inheritance of land had to wear grey or white clothes reflecting his new lowered status.

The early English dress code of 1363 for “People of little Means” read as follows:

“Carters, Ploughmen, Drivers of the Plough, Oxherds, Cowherds, Shepherds, Dairyemen, and all other Keepers of Beasts, Threshers of Corn, and all Manner of People of the Estate of a Groom, attending to Husbandry, and all other People that have not 40s of Goods or Chattels shall not wear

any manner of Cloth but Blanket (grey) and Russet Wool and will wear Girdles of Linen according to their estate.”

After independence, these early dress customs or codes were then enacted in medieval Scottish law in 1458:

“No labourers or husbands wear any colour except grey or white on workdays and on holy days only light blue, green and red.”

Few common Highlanders or Lowlanders could afford to disobey the dress codes. These sumptuary laws were repealed in 1698, after which all Scots could wear modern tartan if they could afford the expense. Not many could, so homespun hodden continued as typical rustic dress into the early 19th century.

There is no definitive origin for the word “hodden.” It may have been a loan word into the Scots language from Old Frisian / Mid-Dutch *hoed-en*, meaning to guard or protect.

The first use of the word in Scottish literature is 1579. The term became popular everywhere through Robert Burns’ poem *A Man’s a Man for all That* (1795):

“What though on hamely fare we dine,  
Wear hodden grey, an’ a that;  
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine;  
A Man’s a Man for a’ that.”

Hodden’s use declined in the 18th and 19th centuries. Resurrection in the form of a tweed mixture cloth came in 1859 on its selection by the Commanding Officer of the London Scottish Rifle Volunteers (LSRV). Hodden’s neutral and changeable color was useful as camouflage. Progressively darker over time, hodden grey is still worn by the Toronto Scottish Regiment (Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother’s Own) as their ceremonial uniform.

Many other cultures have produced woolen fabrics similar to hodden but they are known by different names. Loden is still worn in Austria, Germany, and Italy. Duffel was produced in

Belgium and became very popular in the United Kingdom. Melton is still produced as overcoat material in the United Kingdom.

### **HOUPELANDE**

A “houppelande” is an outer garment with a long, full body and flaring sleeves, often lined with fur, worn by both men and women in Europe in the late Middle Ages. The garment was later worn by professional classes, and has remained in Western civilization as the familiar academic and legal robes of today.

### **KIRTLE**

Kirtles (sometimes called cotehardies, see above) were garments worn by men and women in the Middle Ages. The kirtle eventually evolved into a one-piece garment worn by women, from the late Middle Ages into the Baroque period. It was typically worn over a chemise and under the formal outer garment, a gown or surcoat.

In the 11th century, kirtles were similar to men’s tunics and reached to below the knees or lower. They began as loose garments without a waist seam, changing to tightly fitted supportive garments in the 14th century. Later, kirtles could be constructed by combining a fitted bodice with a skirt gathered or pleated into the waist seam. Fastenings were dependent upon the fashion of the day and the garment could be embellished with a variety of decorations including gold, silk, tassels, and knobs. The main materials used in earlier dresses were woolen cloth, fur, linen, cambric, and silk and silver or gold cloth in the case of richer women.

The main differences between a kirtle and the garment called a “dress” were their construction, purpose, and the materials from which they are made. While kirtles were simple, practical garments worn by women of all social classes, dresses were often more elaborate and reserved for more formal occasions.

Kirtles and other medieval clothing, as well as weaponry, form an important topic for LARPs (Live Action Role Play).

### MERLON

A “merlon” is the solid upright section of a battlement (a crenellated parapet) in medieval architecture or fortifications. Merlons are often pierced by narrow, vertical embrasures or slits designed for observation and firing weapons. The space between two merlons is called a crenel (see above), and a succession of merlons and crenels is a crenellation. Crenels designed in later eras for use by cannons were also called embrasures.

The term merlon comes from the French language, adapted from the Italian *merlone*, possibly a shortened form of *mergola*, connected to Latin *mergae* (pitchfork).

As an essential part of battlements, merlons were used in fortifications for millennia. The best-known examples appear on medieval buildings, where battlements, though defensive, could be attractively formed, thus having the secondary purpose of decoration. Some (especially later) buildings have false “decorative battlements.”

Other shapes include: three-pointed, quatrefoil, flower-like, shielded, rounded (typical of the Islamic and African worlds), pyramidal, etc., depending either on the type of attacks expected or aesthetic considerations.

In Roman times, the merlons had a width sufficient to shelter a single man. As new weapons appeared in the Middle Ages (including crossbows and the first firearms), the merlons were enlarged and provided with loopholes of various dimensions and shapes, varying from simply rounded to cruciform. From the 13th century, the merlons could also be used to pivot wooden shutters, which added further protection for the defenders when they were not firing, or firing downwards near the base of the wall. The shutters, also known as mantlets, could be opened by hand, or by using a pulley.

## MURDER HOLE

A “murder hole” is a hole in the ceiling of a passageway in a fortification through which defenders could shoot arrows, throw rocks, or pour harmful substances such as scalding water, hot sand, quicklime, or boiling oil, down on attackers.

Boiling oil was rarely used because it was prohibitively expensive, not often available in large quantities, difficult to heat, problematic to transport around the parapets, and a fire risk. Yet the use of boiling oil has a hold in the popular imagination even though a very small number of references to its use exist. There are far more accounts of boiling water, molten lead, and even heated sand (all of which could penetrate armor more easily than other weapons) being used.

Similar holes, called machicolations, were often located in the curtain walls of castles, fortified manor houses, and city walls. A parapet projected over its wall so that holes would be located over its exterior face, allowing the defenders to target attackers at the base of the wall. The primary difference between the two features is location.

In tower houses, the most common location for murder holes is over the lobby, the equivalent of locating them over a gatehouse in a castle. However, murder holes have been described in a variety of areas within fortified buildings, and there is no completely reliable formula for their placement.

Such holes had other uses. They could act as safe observation points from which the wall footings or a passageway could be seen. If fires were started, either accidentally or deliberately during a siege, the slots could be used to douse the flames with water.

But castles were rarely besieged, and murder holes mostly left untested.

## PELL

“Pell” is another word which has been used in several



different ways.

Obsolete meanings:

- the hide or skin of an animal (a pelt)
- to thump or strike violently (Scottish)
- to walk heavily or hurriedly (Scottish)

The word can also mean:

- a (often wooden or straw) post used as a target for sword practice
- to hasten, hurry
- a roll of parchment, from the Latin *pellis* (skin)
- lined cloak or its lining

### PELL-MELL

To do something “pell-mell” means to do something in a confused, rushed, or impetuous manner. The word “pell” means to hasten, or hurry, so perhaps “pell-mell” is just “pell” on steroids.

However, there’s no evidence that “pell-mell” originated from “pell.” According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the word pell-mell was probably formed through a process called reduplication. This process—which involves the repetition of a word or part of a word, with often a slight change in its form—also generated the terms flip-flop, chitchat, and shilly-shally, the last of which comes from a single-word compression of the question “Shall I?”

For pell-mell, the process of reduplication is believed to have occurred long ago. This word traces to a Middle French word of the same meaning, *pêle-mêle*, which comes from the Old French word *pesle mesle* (12th century), likely a product of reduplication from the Old French word *mesle*, a form of *mesler*, meaning “to mix” or “to mingle.”

Sir Thomas North, in his 1579 translation of *Plutarch’s Lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes*, used the term to mean ‘in disordered confusion.’ Shakespeare also used it in *Richard III*, 1594.

### PALL MALL

There is a possible association between pell-mell and Pall Mall, which is best-known now as the name of a street (formerly an alleyway) in central London. That name was coined from the game “pall mall,” which was played in the alley in medieval days.

On the face of it “pell-mell” and “pall mall” are derived separately and are unrelated. There are early records though, from Samuel Pepys and others, of both the game and the alley being called “pell mell.” That the game was disorderly and confused and the name was coined from that is unlikely. Some people pay little attention to correct spelling.

The name literally means “ball and mallet” and comes via the obsolete French *pallemaille* from Italian *pallamaglio* (palla, a ball + maglio, a mallet).

To play “pall mall,” the players drove the ball along the playing area (an alley) by swinging strongly at it with a mallet. They then had to shoot the ball through a suspended hoop at the end of the field. The person who needed the fewest shots won. It sounds like an early version of hockey, except for the scoring.

### SCHILTRON

A “schiltron” is a compact body of troops, either circular or rectilinear, forming a battle array, shield wall, or phalanx. The term is most often associated with Scottish pike formations during the Wars of Scottish Independence in the late 13th and early 14th centuries.

The term dates from at least 1000 CE, derived from Old English roots expressing the idea of a “shield-troop.” Some research claims that “schiltron” is derived from a Viking tight circular formation (at least a thousand fighters), intended to present an enemy’s cavalry charge with a perimeter that horses refuse to breach. Such use may have had a long previous history in Scotland, as the Picts used to employ spears in block formation as the backbone of their armies.

### SERJEANT

- The holder of a serjeanty, a type of feudal land-holding in England
- A generally obsolete spelling of sergeant
- Serjeant-at-arms, an officer appointed to keep order during meetings

### SHERIFF

A “sheriff,” in medieval times, was the king’s highest representative in a county, responsible for collecting local taxes and for maintaining law and order.

### WASTER

A waster can be:

- a wasteful person or thing
- a person who does little or nothing of value
- a discarded piece of defective pottery
- one who spends or consumes extravagantly and without thought for the future
- one that lays waste; a destroyer, a waster of enemy cities

In martial arts, however, a waster is a practice weapon, usually a sword, and usually made out of wood, though nylon (plastic) wasters are also available. Wasters, as wooden practice weapons, have been found in many cultures over many centuries. They took a variety of forms, ranging from simple sticks to careful replicas of real swords.

Used commonly in the modern historical European martial arts community, the term refers to wasters fashioned to resemble western European weapons like the longsword or arming sword. Historically, the term “waster” was used in English to refer to cudgels or clubs used as weapons, in addition to wooden swords.

Wooden practice swords have been in use since the Late Bronze Age, with an original sword still in existence at the National Museum of Edinburgh. Egyptian soldiers practiced

a type of sport fencing using blunt sticks. The Romans used a form of wooden sword, the *rudis*, for combat training. It is also found that Roman gladiators trained with a heavy wooden sword against a straw man or a wooden pole known as a *palus* (an early relative of the later wooden pell).

### WATTLE AND DAUB

“Wattle and daub” is a traditional method used in building walls, where a network of interwoven sticks and twigs called “wattle” is “daubed” with a sticky material usually made of some combination of wet soil, clay, sand, animal dung, and straw. Wattle and daub has been used for at least 6,000 years and is still an important construction method in many parts of the world. Several historic buildings include wattle and daub construction, illustrating its strength.

Evidence for wattle and daub (or “wattle and reed”) fire pits, storage bins, and buildings shows up in Egyptian dig sites dating back to the 5th millennium BCE. It predated the use of mud brick and continued to be the preferred building material until about the start of the First Dynasty.

The wattle is made by weaving thin branches (usually split) or slats between upright stakes. Reinforcement is provided by straw, hair, hay or other fibrous materials, which help to hold the mix together as well as to control shrinkage and provide flexibility. The daub may be mixed by hand, or by treading — either by humans or livestock. It is then applied to the wattle and allowed to dry, and often then whitewashed to increase its resistance to rain. Sometimes there can be more than one layer of daub.

This process has been replaced in modern architecture by brick and mortar or by lath and plaster. These are common building materials for wall and ceiling surfaces, in which a series of nailed wooden strips are covered with plaster smoothed into a flat surface. In many regions this building method has now been overtaken by drywall construction using plasterboard sheets.

Permaculture advocates call wattle and daub a quick, easy, and seismic resistant natural building option. Many people dream about building their own earthen home, whether that be from cob, adobe, rammed earth, or any other natural building technique. The idea of using, with one's own hands, the earth beneath one's feet to create a permanent shelter is indeed captivating.

However, a good number of natural, earthen homes have been abandoned during the construction phase because of the large amount of work involved. Earth is heavy, and the process of mixing clay, sand, straw and other aggregate material to eventually lift onto the walls of your future home is definitely not easy.

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Food for Thought

(quote from the book)

“Three days later, we rode wearily through the gates of Hermitage Castle. Sir William groaned as he dismounted. I slid from the saddle, dirty, sweaty, tired, and wondering if burning the homes of peasants was the best way to defeat the greed of Edward Plantagenet. I was just a squire's bastard. What did I know? It had worked for our fathers only for a few short years. Then the next greedy English King was back stealing what was not his. It was not for me to decide, but to follow my lord's commands. But I did wonder.”



Ivanhoe

Ivanhoe: A Romance, by Walter Scott, first published in December 1819, is a historical novel and one of Scott's best-known and most influential works. The novel has been the basis for several motion pictures, for TV, and for opera.

Ivanhoe is the story of one of the remaining Anglo-Saxon noble families at a time when the nobility in England had become overwhelmingly Norman. The story is set in the Middle Ages, in 1194. With its colorful descriptions of a tournament, outlaws, a witch trial, and the divisions between Jews and Christians, Normans and Saxons, the novel has been credited with inspiring increased interest in chivalric romance and medievalism.

According to reviewers, neither his language, his plotting, nor his ideology are genuinely medieval because his aim was to write a compelling novel, not a history book. The overall story is typical 19th century writing, with long narrative passages and vocabulary that is seldom in use today. But it is, of course, the vocabulary that sparks our interest.

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### AGRAFFE

"Agraffe" is borrowed from Middle French *agraffe*, probably a noun derivative of *agrafer*, "to seize with a grappling hook, attach with a clasp." It is used in several ways:

- a metal bracket used in building to hold stones together
- a clasp, often richly ornamented, to fasten clothing or armor
- a device, as a hook, for preventing vibration in the section

of a piano string between the pin and the bridge (these are still used today)

—in classical architecture, a sculptural relief on the face of a keystone

The website of a German champagne maker says, “The (plaque de) muselet (known as ‘agraffe’ in German) refers to the small metal wire structure or metal cap that holds the champagne cork in place on top of the sparkling wine bottle. Since the wine is subject to high pressure, the cork needs to be secured with this wire structure to prevent the cork from shooting out uncontrollably. The agraaffe is opened by twisting the wire manually.”

Finally, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* tells us that “agraffe” means medieval pewter metalwork, often in the form of “little plaques and agraffes (hat badges) which were generally miniature versions of religious images worshipped at the place where they were on sale. A number of these Italian, English, French, and German pilgrim badges, dating from the 13th to the 16th century, have survived.”

Obviously, agraaffe was, and still is, a useful word.

### BALDRIC

A “baldric” is a belt to hold a sword or other piece of equipment (such as a bugle or drum), worn over one shoulder and reaching down to the opposite hip.

Baldrics have been used at least since ancient Roman times, usually as part of military dress. The design offers more support for weight than a standard waist belt, without restricting movement of the arms, and while allowing easy access to the object carried.

In modern times, the baldric often fills a ceremonial role rather than a practical one. Many non-military or paramilitary organizations include baldrics as part of ceremonial dress. Military drum majors usually wear a baldric. A crossed pair

of baldrics is often worn as part of the uniform of Morris dancers; differently colored baldrics help to distinguish different sides.

Baldrics appear in the classical literary canon, and later in fantasy and science fiction genres. The yeoman in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is described as wearing a "baldric of bright green." (14th century) A baldric features prominently in Chapter 4 of Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. (19th century) And, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Boromir is described as follows: "On a baldric he wore a great horn tipped with silver that now was laid upon his knees." (20th century)

In *Star Trek*, some species such as Klingons wear baldrics. *Pirates of the Caribbean* features baldrics worn by many characters. *Doctor Who* features Silurian warrior Vastra and human maid Jenny Flint, who use baldrics to carry katana swords.

LARP (live action role play) groups often use baldrics as part of costumes for re-enactment, storytelling, and gaming.

### **BUXOM**

Today, "buxom" describes a plump woman, especially with large breasts. In the 12th century it meant full of gaiety, or lively.

And, before that, the use now obsolete, it meant obedient, tractable, pliant, or offering little resistance. On the other hand, if you were "unbuxom," you were defiant or unruly by nature, willful, rebellious, disobedient.

Okay, we'll admit it. We're unbuxom.

### **CAP-A-PIE**

"Cap-a-pie" means "from head to foot," especially of armor or other military dress.



### CARDECU

A silver French coin worth a quarter of an *écu*, first issued in the late 1500s by Henry III.

### CHURL

Before the 12th century, “churl” (also spelled “ceorl”) meant “a man,” or more particularly, “a free man.”

The word soon came to mean “a peasant,” denoting the lowest rank of freemen. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it later came to mean the opposite of nobility and royalty, “a common person.”

This meaning held through the 15th century, but by then the word had taken on negative overtones, meaning “a country person” and then “a low fellow.” By the 19th century, a new and pejorative meaning arose, “one inclined to uncivil or loutish behavior,” which is where our adjective “churlish” came from.

The word is linked to some place names throughout the Anglophone world, in towns such as Carlton and Charlton, meaning “the farmstead of the churls.” Personal names such as Carl and Charles are also derived from cognates of churl.

While the word churl went down in the social scale, the given name “Charles,” derived from the same etymological source, remained prestigious enough to be used frequently by many European royal families, owing originally to the fame of Charlemagne, to which was added that of later illustrious kings and emperors of the same name.

### CURTAL

This word, now considered obsolete or archaic, is a variant of “curtail,” and meant shortened, abridged, or brief. It was used to describe horses having a docked tail, or a woman wearing a short frock and often applied to a friar with a short gown.

As a noun, it meant a dulcian or bassoon of the late 16th to early 18th century.

### DINGLE

A “dingle” is a deep, secluded wooded valley or dell.

### FUSTIAN

Fustian has two meanings:

- thick, durable twilled cloth with a short nap, usually dyed in dark colors
- pompous or pretentious speech or writing

Fustian, as a variety of heavy cloth, was chiefly meant for men and was mostly worn by workers during the 19th century. Accordingly, radical elements of the British working class chose to wear fustian jackets as a symbol of their class allegiance.

Fustian, as pretentious writing or speech, appears from the time of Shakespeare. This literary use arose because the cloth type was often used as padding. Therefore, purposeless words are fustian. Bombast, plant fiber used directly as padding (and not as fabric), has a similar literary meaning.

### GAMMON

“Gammon,” a word chiefly used in Britain, is ham that has been cured or smoked like bacon. And, like bacon, it must be cooked before it can be eaten; in that sense gammon is comparable to fresh pork meat, and different from dry-cured ham like jamón serrano or prosciutto.

The word “gammon” is derived from the Middle English word “gambon,” meaning ham, seen in written form since the early 15th century and derived from French *gambon*.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the word (sometimes

extended to the phrase “gammon and spinach”) had come to mean “humbug, a ridiculous story, deceitful talk.”

Gammon is now a pejorative popularized in British political culture since around 2012. The term refers in particular to the color of a white person’s flushed face when expressing strong opinions, as compared to the type of pork of the same name. The *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to it as “a particularly reddish or florid complexion.”

Since the mid-20th century, the archetype of a red-faced, angry, pompous, jingoistic, and stereotypically British right-wing male has been seen in popular culture, with the character Colonel Blimp first appearing in 1934.

In 2018, it became particularly known as a term to describe either those on the political right or those who supported Brexit.

### **HALIDOM**

This now obsolete word meant holiness, sanctity, sacred honor, sanctuary, or lands held by a religious foundation.

### **HERSHIP**

Now an obsolete word, “hership” meant the act of pillaging, devastation, and plunder, usually a warlike raid to steal cattle. It was also used to refer to the distress caused by such a raid and the loot stolen in a hership.

### **HILDING**

A “hilding” is a contemptible individual, a wretch. The word is likely a contraction of earlier “hilderling,” itself an alteration of “hinderling.”

### **HOLDING**

The word “holding” is used in several ways:

- the act of one that holds
- a section of land leased, especially for agriculture
- as “holdings,” legally owned property, as securities.
- as “holdings,” the collection of books, periodicals, and so on in a library
- the illegal obstruction of an opponent, as in football, basketball, or ice hockey, by use of the hands, arms, or stick.
- a ruling of a court, especially on an issue of law raised in a case

### **JEOPARD**

To “jeopard” means to put in jeopardy; to expose to loss, injury, hazard, or risk.

### **MORAT**

Morat is a medieval drink of wine flavored with mulberries.

### **PALMER**

A “palmer” is a medieval European pilgrim bearing a palm branch as a sign of a pilgrimage made to the Holy Land. The name can also refer to the palms that are traditionally carried by Christians on the Sunday before Easter Sunday.

As a given name, “Palmer” has been among the one thousand most popular given names for girls in the US since 2018 and among the 300 most popular names for American girls since 2022. It is one of a number of surnames or previously masculine given names that have become fashionable for American girls. There were 1,071 American newborn girls named Palmer in 2022 compared with 199 newborn American boys.

### **PINFOLD**

A “pinfold” is a pound, or a pen where stray animals are confined until payment is made to secure their release.

## PULSE

The word “pulse” is used today in several ways, but in medieval days it meant the edible seeds of various leguminous plants, as well as the plants themselves. It includes any agriculturally significant annual leguminous food crop, such as peas, beans, lentils, and chickpeas.

The first evidence of pulses comes from 11,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, a region in the Middle East which was home to some of the earliest human civilizations. These days, approximately 170 different countries grow and export pulses.

## RERESUPPER

A “reresupper” was a late or second supper, since at least the fifteenth century. The first part of the name comes from an obsolete form of “rear.”

Sir Walter Scott described it this way: “Rere-suppers belonged to a species of luxury introduced in the jolly days of King James’s extravagance and continued through the subsequent reign. The supper took place at an early hour, six or seven o’clock at latest – the rere-supper was a postliminary banquet, an hors d’oeuvre, which made its appearance at ten or eleven, and served as an apology for prolonging the entertainment till midnight.”

Being food-lovers, we couldn’t resist quoting from Christian Isobel Johnstone’s book, *The Cook and Housewife’s Manual* (1828):

“When a formal supper is set out, the principal dishes are understood to be roasted game or poultry, cold meats sliced, ham, tongue, collared and potted things, grated beef, Dutch herring, kipper, highly-seasoned pies of game, &c. &c., with, occasionally, soups, - an addition to modern suppers which, after the heat and fatigue of a ball-room, or large party, is found peculiarly grateful and restorative. Minced white meats, lobsters, oysters, collared eels, and crawfish, all dressed in various forms; sago, rice, the more delicate vegetables,

poached eggs, scalloped potatoes, or potatoes in balls, or as Westphalia cakes, are all suitable articles of the solid kind. To these we may add cakes, tarts, possets, creams, jellies in glasses or various shapes, custards, preserved or dried fruits, pancakes, fritters, puffs, tartlets, grated cheese, butter in little forms, sandwiches; and the catalogue of the more stimulating dishes, as anchovy toasts, devils, Welsh, English, and Scotch rabbits, roasted onions, salmagundi, smoked sausages sliced, and those other preparations which are best adapted to what among ancient bon vivants was called the *rere-supper*."

After all that, though, we admit to feeling rather over-full.

### ROMAUNT

"Romaunt" is the archaic word for romance, or a romantic tale or poem.

### SENDAL

"Sendal" is a thin medieval silk used for fine clothing and church vestments.

### SEWER

We tend to think of "sewer" as a large underground channel to carry off sewerage or surface water, or even as someone who sews. But, in the Middle Ages, it meant a medieval household officer, often of high rank, in charge of serving the dishes at table and sometimes of seating and tasting. The word comes from Anglo-French *asseour*, literally, "seater."

### SHAVELING

Shaveling is an archaic word meaning someone with all or part of their head shaved, notably a clergyman or priest with a tonsured head, or a youth physically mature enough to shave. The term was often used in a disparaging way.

### SIMARRE

A “simar,” as defined in the 1913 *Webster’s Dictionary*, is “a woman’s long dress or robe; also light covering; a scarf.” The word is derived from French *simarre*, and is also written as *cimar*, *cymar*, *samare*, and *simare*.

Walter Scott used the spelling “*simarre*.” For example, “her sable tresses, which, each arranged in its own little spiral of twisted curls, fell down upon as much of a lovely neck and bosom as a *simarre* of the richest Persian silk, exhibiting flowers in their natural colors embossed upon a purple ground, permitted to be visible.”

### SOUL SCOT

A “soul scot,” or less commonly, “soul shot” or “soul scat,” is a mortuary fee or present paid to the clergy from a deceased’s estate.

### URUS

A “urus” is an extinct, shaggy, long-horned wild ox, formerly common in Europe and thought to be an ancestor of modern domestic cattle. It’s what we would call the aurochs.

### VAIR

The word “vair” was brought into Middle English from Old French, from Latin *varius* meaning “variegated.”

Vair is a fur, probably Russian squirrel, used for lining and trimming robes and for ornamental purposes in the Middle Ages. The fur gave its name to a set of different patterns used in heraldry. Heraldic vair was made from pieces of the greyish-blue backs of squirrels sewn together with pieces of the animals’ white underbellies. Vair is the second-most common fur in heraldry, after ermine.

### VIZARD

A “vizard” (also spelled visard) is an oval mask of black velvet, worn by travelling women in the 16th century to protect their skin from sunburn. The fashion of the period for wealthy women was to keep their skin pale, because a tan suggested that the bearer worked outside and was hence poor. Some types of vizard were not held in place by a fastening or ribbon ties and, instead, the wearer clasped a bead attached to the interior of the mask between their teeth.

Which would be one way of keeping women from talking.

And no, vizard has no connection with “wizard,” even though they are spelled the same except for the first letter. “Wizard” comes from the Middle English word *wysard*, from *wis* or *wys*, meaning “wise.”

Vizard does, however, have the same root as “vizor.” They both originated, as did “visage,” from Middle English *viser*, from Anglo-French, from *vis*, meaning face.

### WHITTLE

“Whittle” usually means to cut or shave strips from wood with a knife, or to make a shape by paring or shaving. It can also mean, when followed by “away” or “down,” to wear away gradually. In Northern English dialect, it means to complain or worry about something continually.

But, in medieval days, “whittle” was a noun and meant a large knife.





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